

Elder's Leadership Training: The Local Congregation and Its Spiritual Care

[Prepared for WELS Board for Parish Services]

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Part One: The Office of the Elder

A. General Meaning of Elder in the Bible

The Lord said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people... I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone." *Numbers 11:16,17*

All of you are standing today in the presence of the Lord your God—your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel. *Deuteronomy 29:10*

The elders and prominent men are the head and the prophets who teach lies are the tail. Those who guide his people mislead them, and those who are guided are led astray. *Isaiah 9:15*

He made [Joseph] master of his household, ruler over all he possessed to discipline his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom. *Psalms 145:22*

Let them exalt [the Lord] in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders. *Psalms 107:32*

Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, “Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech... *Ruth 4:9*

The chief priests and the elders of the people came to [Jesus]. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?” *Matthew 21:23*

So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus “Why don’t your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with ‘unclean’ hands?” *Mark 7:5*

Surrounding the throne were twenty- four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty- four elders. They were dressed in white. *Revelation 4:4*

Elder is a general term for a leader. In the Old Testament an elder was both a community and religious leader. In addition to religious duties, community leadership among God’s people, Israel, necessarily included setting a good example and rendering judgments in disputes. The OT word for elder comes from *zacheen*, meaning old, aged, bearded. The NT word for elder is *presbuteros*, meaning old man.

B. Meaning of Elder in New Testament Congregations

Paul and Barnabas *appointed elders for them in each church* and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust. *Acts 14:23*

So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the *apostles and elders* about this question. *Acts 15:2*

As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the *apostles and elders* in Jerusalem for the people to obey. So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers. *Acts 16:4*

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them, “...*Guard yourselves and all the flock* of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.” *Acts 20:17,28 - 32*

The *elders who direct the affairs of the church* well are worthy of double honor, *especially those whose work is preaching and teaching*. *1 Timothy 5:17*

To the elders among you. I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ’s sufferings and as one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: *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*. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. *1 Peter 5:1 - 4*

Is any one of you *sick*? *He should call the elders of the church* to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. *James 5:14*

NT congregations seem to have many elders (Acts 20:17; Titus 1:5). Elders were older, more spiritually mature. Spiritual leadership was more honorable than general leadership (1 Timothy 5:17). Elders had overall spiritual care of congregation (1 Peter 5:1- 4; Acts 20:28). High personal qualifications (Titus 1:5- 9) and the example of a good life was required (Hebrews 13:7; 1 Peter 5:3). Elders were to watch out for false doctrine (Acts 20:28- 31; Titus 1:9) and make sick calls (James 5:14). The elder was very close to what we think of as a pastor today, but not identical (1 Peter 5:1; 1 Timothy 3:1).

C. The Office of Elder in Our Churches Today

1. The New Testament gives examples of church offices but does not specify any particular form of the

office of the public ministry. Our Lutheran confessions teach that we have the liberty to define and fill forms of the ministerial office according to our circumstances and needs.

And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. *Augsburg Confession, Article VII.*

We believe, teach, and confess that the congregation of God of every place and every time has the power, according to its circumstances, to change such ceremonies in such manner as may be most useful and edifying to the congregation of God. *Formula of Concord, Epitome X "Of Church Rites"*

2. The doctrinal statements of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod specify that such freedom in ceremonies includes the defining of forms of public ministry.

There is, however, *no direct word of institution for any particular form of the public ministry.* The one public ministry of the Gospel may assume various forms, as circumstances demand (Acts 6:1- 6). The specific forms in which Christians establish the public ministry have not been prescribed by the Lord to His New Testament Church. It is the Holy Spirit who through the gift of their common faith leads the believers to establish the adequate and wholesome forms which fit every circumstance, situation, and need. Various functions are mentioned in Scripture: 1 Tim. 2:2; John 21:15- 17 (feeding); Acts 20:28 (watching); 1 Timothy 3:2; 4:11; 6:2 (teaching); 1 Timothy 3:5; 5:17 (ruling). *Doctrinal Statements of the WELS, 1970, p 11*

Since Scripture does not make the external forms of the ministry a matter of divine mandate, these can change and have changed over the centuries. *Shepherd Under Christ, p22*

3. Although God has given us the freedom to define the forms of ministerial offices, most of our WELS churches share a remarkable unanimity in their view of the work of elders.

Most of our congregations are structured with three major boards or subgroups under a council. One board is called the elders, a second the trustees, the third, the board for Christian education. To the elders is usually entrusted the work of overseeing the spiritual welfare of adult members. This includes the preparation and decorum of the worship service, receiving and dismissing members, discipline, stewardship, evangelism, care for called workers and adult Bible study (See *Shepherd under Christ, pp317 - 322*)

D. The Divine Call of the Elder

1. The Bible teaches that the call to every form of public ministry is a call from God.

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them, "...Guard yourselves and all the flock of which *the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.* *Acts 20:28*

[Christ] gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service. *Ephesians 4:11,12*

All Christians are equal before God... and all are equally entrusted with the same ministry of the Gospel (1 Peter 2:9). Hence *no one may assume the function of the public ministry except through a legitimate call* (Smalcald Articles, p522:67- 69). The authority to call is... given to the Church. Hence it is proper to speak of the derived right of a local congregation to call... God gives to the Church men qualified for the various forms of the work required... Thus these ministers are appointed by God... In spite of the great diversity in the external form of the ministerial work, the ministry is essentially one. *The various offices for the public preaching of the Gospel, not only those enumerated above, e.g., in Ephesians 4:11 and 1 Corinthians 12:28, but also those developed in our day, are all gifts of the exalted Christ to His Church* which the Church receives gratefully and with due regard for love and order employs under the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the spiritual body of Christ. *Doctrinal Statements of the WELS, 1970, pp 10,11*

2. It is good to acknowledge the divine call in a formal way.

They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. *Acts 6:6*

According to Acts 20:28, the elders of Ephesus are told that it is the Holy Ghost who made them

overseers with the responsibility to feed the flock of God with His Word. Their call, a mediate call, was nonetheless divine... We view the ordination and every installation as public recognition or confirmation of the validity and legitimacy of the call that was sent and accepted. *Shepherd under Christ, pp23,49*

E. What Congregations Owe their Elders

1. Honor (See *Catechism, Enchiridion, p17: "Table of Duties"*)

The *elders who direct the affairs of the church* well are worthy of double honor, *especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17*

Now we ask you, brothers, *to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. 1 Thessalonians 5:12*

2. Obedience

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. *Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you. Hebrews 13:17*

As they traveled from town to town, they delivered the *decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey.*

3. Pay

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For *the Scripture says, "The worker deserves his wages."* *1 Timothy 5:17*

Anyone who receives instruction in the word must *share all things with his instructor. Galations 6:6*

4. Following example

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Hebrews 13:7.

Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self- controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance... Similarly, encourage the young men to be self- controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. *Titus 2:2,6, 7*

5. Prayer

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church... "Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace..." When he had said the, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. *Acts 20:17,32,36*

They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. *Acts 6:6*

Part Two: Discipline in the Church

A. Elders Care about their Church's Teachings

[An elder] must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as he has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. *Titus 1:9*

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. *Acts 2:42*

From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them... "Guard yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! ...*Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you and inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Acts 20:17*

Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh have gone out into the world... Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; *whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.* 2 John 7- 9

B. Elders Carry Out Doctrinal Discipline

Warn a divisive person once and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self- condemned. *Titus 3:10,11*

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. *Keep away from them.* For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. *Romans 16:17,18*

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, *do not take him into your house or welcome him.* Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work. *2 John 10:11*

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, *take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.* Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. *2 Thessalonians 3:14,15*

The punishment for doctrinal discipline varies with the severity of the offense. It ranges from *shunning*, or *avoidance*, to *breaking fellowship* with those who cannot understand the truth, to *excommunication* for those who know the truth but refuse to accept it.

C. Elders Care About Christian Life

An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a male whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since *an overseer* is entrusted with God's work, he *must be blameless* not overbearing, not quick- tempered, not given to much wine, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who *is self- controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.* *Titus 1:5- 8*

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. *Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.* *Hebrews 13:7*

[Elders, be] eager to serve, not lording it over those entrusted to you, but *being examples to the flock.* *1 Peter 5:3*

D. Elders Carry Out Discipline for Immoral Living

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have *put out of your fellowship the man who did this ? ... When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus* and I am with you spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, *hand this man over to Satan*, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good. *1 Corinthians 5:1- 6*

My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: *Whoever turns a sinner away from his error* will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins. *James 5:19*

I am writing you that *you must not associate with* anyone who called himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. *With such a man do not even eat.* *1 Corinthians 5:11*

E. Elders Keep in Mind the Purpose of Christian Discipline

If he listens to you, you will have *won your brother over*. *Matthew 18:15*

Hand this man over to Satan, so that *the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord*. *1 Corinthians 5:5*

The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient for him. Now instead, *you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow*. I urge you, therefore, to *reaffirm your love for him*. *2 Corinthians 2:6, 7*

My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: *Whoever turns a sinner away from his error will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins*. *James 5:20*

F. Elders Use an Evangelical Approach to Discipline

If your brother sins against you, *go and show him his fault, just between the two of you*. If he listens to you, you will have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so *that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses*. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. *Matthew 18:15 - 18*

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, *you who are spiritual should restore him gently*. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. *Galatians 6:1,2*

When Peter came to Antioch, *I opposed him to his face, because he was in the wrong*. *Galatians 2:11*

Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but *warn him as a brother*. *2 Thessalonians 3:15*

A gossip betrays a confidence, but *a trustworthy man keeps a secret*. *Proverbs 11:13*

Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. *Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly*, so that the others may take warning. *1 Timothy 5:19,20*

An evangelical approach 1) stresses gospel over law; 2) emphasizes winning the sinner over, not punishing him or cleaning up the church; 3) patiently repeats the steps of admonition; 4) uses personal contact rather than phone calls and letters to carry out disciplinary work; 5) guarantees confidentiality for private sin unless the refusal to repent makes the sin public; 6) openly rebukes public sin; 7) requires the offended brother to make the first contact with the sinner; 8) accepts a charge against a brother only when it can be substantiated; does not act on rumors; 9) instructs every member of the congregation about his responsibility toward erring brothers.

Part Three: Nurturing the Church

A. Elders Assess the Spiritual Needs of their Parish

Only 44% of our members attend church on Sunday.

Only 11% of our members attend any formal Bible study (10% of all Americans go to some form of weekly Bible study—Gallop).

By age 19 only 38% of our Lutheran elementary school graduates still attend church as often as twice a month.

Only 32% of our public school confirmands worship twice a month or more.

We confirm only 69% of the babies we baptize.

Only 4 % of our councilmen and elders come to Bible study. Only 5% of our homes have daily Bible study or devotions.

B. Elders Treat the Disease, Not Just the Symptoms

Since the 1960's WELS congregations have been treating the symptoms of spiritual weakness one by

one. First it was stewardship, then evangelism, then youth ministry, then family ministry, then planning and now leadership training. The first WELS administrator was for stewardship. By the late seventies we had added an administrator for evangelism. The 1970's and eighties were a boom time for new area Lutheran high schools and the training of youth counselors in parishes. Today staff ministers attack a variety of symptoms of spiritual weakness: family life, outreach, youth, administration, mercy ministry.

At the heart of all spiritual weaknesses, however, is weakness of faith. And faith can be created and strengthened in only one way. Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ. *Romans 10:17*

C. Elders Recognize the One Thing Needful

Mary... sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "*You are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed.* May has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." *Luke 10:39 - 42*

But *seek first his kingdom and his righteousness*, and all these things will be given to you as well. *Matthew 6:33*

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you *hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.* Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. *John 8:31,32*

You *diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life.* These are the Scriptures that testify about me. *John 6:39*

Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and *examined the Scriptures every day* to see if what Paul said was true. *Acts 17:11*

And this is my prayer: that your love may *abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight* so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ. *Philippians 1:9 - 11*

[Jesus] who gave some to be... pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and *become mature*, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will *no longer be infants*, tossed back and forth by the waves, and *blown here and there by every wind of teaching* and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead speaking the truth in love, will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. *Ephesians 4:11 - 15*

See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet *you have kept my word* and have not denied by name. *Revelation 3:8*

D. Elders Set an Example for Bible Study

If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle. *1 Corinthians 14:8*

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. *Hebrews 13:7*

[An elder] 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. *Titus 1:9*

E. Elders Grow in the Qualities of Lutheran Leadership

1. Humility

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that *the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them*, And their high official exercise authority over them. *Not so with you. Instead whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant.* and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." *Matthew 20:25-28.*

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your

attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who... humbled himself... even to death on a cross!

Philippians 2:3 - 8

2. Optimism, hope

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And *we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Romans 5:1,2*

I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. *I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Philippians 4:12,13*

Jesus replied, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." *Luke 18:27*

I tell you the truth, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. *Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete. John 16:23,24*

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain. *1 Corinthians 15:58*

Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. *2 Corinthians 3:4 - 6*

3. Patience

Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. *2 Timothy 4.2*

Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the fall and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. *James 5:7,8*

4. Labor, toil, sacrifice

Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me, and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. *Matthew 10:37 - 39* (Part of Jesus' leadership training speech to his twelve disciples before sending them out.)

Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer. Similarly, if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules. The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops. Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all of this. *2 Timothy 2:3 - 7*

5. Diligence, faithfulness

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you have learned it. *2 Timothy 3:14*

Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. *Revelation 2:10*

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. *1 Peter 4:10*

6. Love

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing... Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. *1 Corinthians 13:2,4,5*

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. *Ephesians 4:14,15*

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins. *1 Peter 4:8*

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder... Be shepherds of God's flock...not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. *1 Peter 5:1 - 3 3*

Part Four: Growth in the Church

A. Elders Know the Savior's Mission for their Parish

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. *Matthew 28:19,20*

[Jesus] said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation." *Mark 16:15*

[God's] intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. *Ephesians 3:10,11*

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth. *Acts 1:7,8*

B. Elders Balance Outreach Ministry with Nurture

I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. *John 10:16*

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. *John 17:20,21*

C. Elders Understand Church and Change

1. Know that doctrine and practice must never change in the church.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. *Revelation 22:18,19*

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for your hearts to be strengthened by grace. *Hebrews 13:8,9*

Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." *John 8:31,32*

2. Know that anything God has not required in his word may change in the church.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery. *Galatians 5:1*

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship... but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. *Colossians 2:123*

Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters... One man considers one day more sacred than another, another man considers every day alike... Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way... Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. *Romans 14*

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible... I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for

the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. 1 Corinthians 9:19- 23

We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. 2 Corinthians 6:3

And to the true unity of the Church it is enough to agree concerning the doctrine of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments. Nor is it necessary that human traditions, that is, rites or ceremonies, instituted by men, should be everywhere alike. Augsburg Confession, VII, *Of the Church*, Triglotta, p47

1. For the settling also this controversy we unanimously believe, teach, and confess that the ceremonies or church rites which are neither commanded nor forbidden in God's Word, but have been instituted alone for the sake of propriety and good order, are in and of themselves no divine worship, nor even a part of it. *Matt. 15:9*: In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. 2. We believe, teach and confess that the congregation of God of every place and every time has the power, according to its circumstances, to change such ceremonies in such manner as may be most useful and edifying to the congregation of God. *Formula of Concord, Epitome, X., Of Church Rites*, Triglotta, I, p829.

3. Know what must change in the church.

a. God through his word must change our attitude about our sins and our need for his forgiveness.

(Repentance)

And [Jesus] said, "I tell you the truth, unless you *change and become like little children*, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. *Matthew 18:3*

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, "*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is near." *Matthew 3:1*

After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. *Repent and believe and believe the good news!*" *Mark 1:14*

The meaning of baptism for our daily life: Fourth: What does baptizing with water mean? It means that our Old Adam with his evil deeds and desires should be drowned by *daily contrition and repentance*, and died, and that day by day a new man should arise, as from the dead, to live in the presence of God in righteousness and purity now and forever.

b. We must change any tradition or custom that stands in the way of the furtherance of the gospel.

(Impediment to the gospel)

Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way... Let us therefore *make ever effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification*. *Romans 14:13,19*

Likewise, the article concerning Christian liberty also is here at stake, which the Holy Ghost through the mouth of the holy apostle so earnestly charged His Church to preserve, as we have just heard. For as soon as this is weakened and the ordinances of men [human traditions] are forced upon the Church with coercion, as though it were wrong and a sin to omit them, the way is already prepared for idolatry, and by this means ordinances of men [human traditions] are afterwards multiplied and regarded as a divine worship, not only equal to the ordinances of God, but are even placed above them. *Formula of Concord, Thor. Decl. X, Of Church Rites*, Triglotta, p1057

Nihil est adiaphoron in casu confessionis et scandali. (Nothing is a matter of indifference when it comes to making a confession of or avoiding offense to the gospel.) *Confessors' summary of F. O. C., X.*

The congregation of God of every place and every time has, according to its circumstances, the good right power and authority... to change [church practices] in and orderly and becoming way as at any time it may be regarded most profitable, most beneficial, and best for maintaining Christian discipline [and for the good order worthy of the profession of the Gospel], and the edification of the Church. Formula of Concord, Thai Dec., X, Of Church Rites, Triglotta, p1055.

D. Elders Plan Their Ministry in a Spiritual Way

1. It is a sin to plan in opposition to the will of God.

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are like a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes... As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. *James 4:13-16*

Jesus answered him, “It is also written: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” *Matthew 4: 7*
“Woe to the obstinate children,” declares the Lord, “to those who carry out plans that are not mine.”
Isaiah 30:1

2. It is a sin not to plan in accordance with God’s will.

Instead, *you ought to say*, “*If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that...*” Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins. *James 4:13 - 16*

But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way. *1 Corinthians 14:40*

The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty. *Proverbs 21:5*

Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? And if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him. *Luke 14:28-30*

But the noble man makes noble plans, and by noble deeds he stands. *Isaiah 32:8*

Planning in line with God’s will is a part of Christian stewardship.

E. Elders Reorganize for Spiritual Growth

I have become all things to all men so that *by all possible means* I might save some. *I do all this for the sake of the gospel*, that I may share in its blessings. *1 Corinthians 9:22,23*

What *form* the congregational organization will take is a matter of Christian liberty. Scripture does not provide a list of required officers. All of this *will develop according to need* (cf Ac 6:1ff) and will not be identical in all congregations. Everything that is necessary for the furtherance of the congregation’s gospel ministry should be included, but no more. *Shepherd under Christ* p317

Since the form of parish polity (organizational structure) is to follow function (work, that is, mission or God-assigned task), the structure of the board of elders should meet the ministry needs which God has made evident to your congregation.

