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A NOBLE TASK:
THE WORK OF ELDERS IN THE
CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES
IN MANITOBA

By

ANDREW JACOB POL

A dissertation submitted
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Ministry

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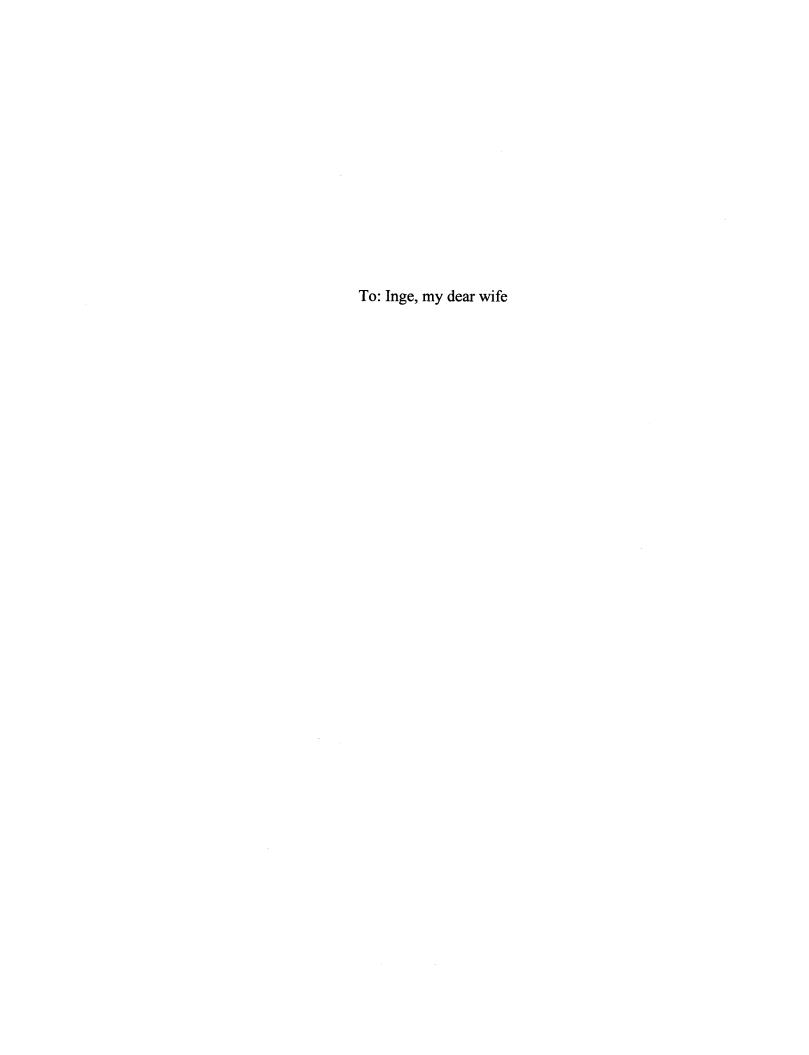
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To: Inge, my dear wife

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Abstract

A NOBLE TASK:
THE WORK OF ELDERS IN THE
CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES
IN MANITOBA

by Andrew J. Pol

Although Scripture speaks about elders in the Old Testament and New Testament, many churches in North America do not maintain eldership as a distinct ecclesiastical office. The Canadian Reformed Churches are different in this respect since ordained elders serve in their midst next to ministers of the Word and deacons. This dissertation is designed to determine within the context of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Manitoba how elders individually and as a body can be helped to understand more deeply their role and importance in preparing "God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph 4:12).

The following three questions guided the exploration of this topic. What does the Bible say about offices, in particular the office of elder? Which insights of Martin Bucer and John Calvin, two Reformers of the 16th Century, are either already reflected in or could enrich the Canadian Reformed understanding of office, in particular the office of elder? What information can be derived from input given by elders and congregation

members to help establish what elders in the Canadian Reformed Churches need to know and be able to do in order to function effectively in their work of shepherding the flock?

Questions characteristic of quantitative and qualitative research were formulated for surveys in order to gather input from two rural and two city congregations in the province of Manitoba. The results are summarized and assessed in the body of the dissertation, while much of the statistical data is available in separate tables in appendices.

The research provides content and direction for the development of materials that can be of assistance in training elders in a way that will give them a stronger sense of identity, purpose, and focus in fulfilling their tasks in the midst of the Canadian Reformed Churches that they serve.

CONTENTS

Tables

Abbreviations of Bible Books

Genesis	Ge
Exodus	Ex
Leviticus	Lev
Numbers	Nu
Deuteronomy	Dt
Joshua	Jos
Judges	Jdg
1 Samuel	1 Sa
2 Samuel	2 Sa
1 Kings	1 Ki
Psalms	Ps
Proverbs	Pr
Matthew	Mt
John	Jn
Acts	Ac
Romans	Ro
1 Corinthians	1 Co
2 Corinthians	2 Co
Galatians	Gal
Ephesians	Eph
Philippians	Php
Thessalonians	Th
1 Timothy	1 Ti
2 Timothy	2 Ti
Titus	Tit
Hebrews	Heb
1 Peter	1 Pe

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

One of the books in a Doctor of Ministry class on leadership at Providence

Seminary was by Alexander Strauch on *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore*

Biblical Church Leadership.[1] While reflecting on the title, it struck me that of all the

students I was the only one serving a church that has elders fulfilling a role as outlined in

Scripture. What was observable among the limited number of students from different

churches in the North American context is a symptom of the fact that many churches in

North America have lost sight of the vital role that elders can play in church leadership.

During discussion later with the elders of the church I serve, the conclusion arose that it

is important for us not to take for granted the riches that we have and then end up losing

them.[2]

What William H. Willimon notes in regard to clergy also applies to elders, when

he indicates that the danger facing them is that they might "'black out,' that is lose

consciousness of why we are here and who we are called to be for Christ and his

church."[3] If elders are no longer sufficiently aware of the importance of their role in the

life of the church and do not function well in the task entrusted to them, this can

undermine the authority and functioning of the office. In the long run neither elders nor

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[1] Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, Colorado: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995). Some deficiencies in Strauch's approach will be pointed out in Chapter Two of this dissertation. However there is much in this book that is worth pondering.
[2] I am a minister of the Canadian Reformed Church of Carman West in Carman, Manitoba. This congregation is one of four Canadian Reformed Churches in the province of Manitoba.
[3] William H. Willimon, *Calling and Character: Virtues of the Ordained Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 21.

congregation members will regard being an elder as a desirable or "noble task" (1 Ti 3:1).

Congregation members will then also not hold them in esteem nor be quick to accept

their guidance. Such a development can lead to the ultimate disappearance of an office

that is prominent in Scripture.

M. Renkema-Hoffman notes that there has been increasing dissatisfaction for

some time in churches of an orthodox Reformed background in the Netherlands in regard

to how office bearers are functioning. It seems difficult to find people who are willing to

serve in this capacity and those who do are feeling increasingly dissatisfied with their

work. Furthermore, questions have arisen as to the best way of doing the work associated

with ecclesiastical office. This has put pressure on the way the offices in the Reformed

churches have been organized. Are changes needed in the structures and ways in which

the office bearers in the Reformed churches do their work? Renkema Hoffman rightly

raises the question to what degree changes can be justified. What are the biblical

principles that need to be retained? How have the offices developed in the course of

church history? What can be learned from church history that could be useful for the

structure of the offices today? Such questions open the way for assessing current efforts

at renewal and for discerning if there is a more efficient and yet Scriptural way to work as

office bearers.[4]

We should not think that such discussions are unique to the Netherlands.

Wherever there are elders, people will develop opinions as to the nature and effectiveness

of their work. Rather than suppress the discussion of such opinions, it is beneficial to

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[4] M. Renkema-Hoffman, *Naar een nieuwe kerkeraad: Een onderzoek naar de principiële uitgangspunten van een gereformeerde ambtsstructuur in de 21e eeuw*, Apeldoornse Studies, no. 48 (Apeldoorn: Theologische Universiteit, 2007), 7-8.

welcome it as an opportunity for enriching the understanding of our biblical, Reformed heritage and for ensuring that elders in particular do their work as well as possible.

Matters concerning the office of elder should be discussed within the broader context of how God has chosen to lead his people in the past. After all, who gives elders the right to exercise leadership, overseeing the doctrine and life of congregation members? Can elders do their work with the conviction that it pleases God to use them in his service? Or is eldership a human institution that has had its day and should now be relegated as a curiosity to the museum of history in favour, for example, of a variety of professional "experts" trained in the social sciences? If one does not have a clear answer to such questions, the value of dealing with various practical issues in regard to how the work of elders should be done becomes very debatable.

The Purpose of this study

This dissertation has been written with the conviction that biblical eldership is a vitally important form of church leadership that needs to be maintained carefully in practice. Scripture refers repeatedly to the work of elders in connection with church leadership. In Old Testament times elders played a prominent role in the life of God's people. The continuing significance of this role in New Testament times can be seen, for example, in the fact that during their missionary journey, "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders ... in each church" (Ac 14:23).

Elders are called to shepherd the church of God, giving faithful leadership by keeping watch over themselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers (Ac 20:28). When they fulfill their task well by word and example, they provide the best evidence of the value that Scripture places on this office. Such ministry

also serves to promote the continuation of this office as a vital form of leadership in the church. The purpose of this study is therefore to determine within the context of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Manitoba how elders individually and as a body can be helped to understand more deeply their role and importance in preparing "God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph 4:12).[5]

Considerations and Guiding Questions

Thought needs to be given as to how to achieve the purpose of the study as described above. The considerations and guiding questions listed below will form the basis for the investigation undertaken in this dissertation.

Churches, and in particular the elders serving in their midst, need to understand the biblical foundation of the office of elder in the church. This understanding can be cultivated by studying relevant Scripture passages underlying the concept of office in general and that of the office of elder in particular. In addition to this, given the context of eldership in the Canadian Reformed Churches, it is beneficial to take note of theological reflection on ecclesiastical offices by two Reformed theologians of the 16th century: Martin Bucer and John Calvin. Special attention will be devoted to insights relevant for the office of elder.

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[5] Unless indicated otherwise, quotes from Scripture are taken from *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996, c 1984). I agree with the way Eph 4:12 is rendered in this translation, which sees the second of the three prepositional phrases as subordinate to the first, thereby completing its meaning and leading to the third phrase which explains the intention of the previous two: "so that the body of Christ may be built up." This is preferable to the interpretation reflected in the King James Version, which treats Eph 4:12 as consisting of three coordinate prepositional phrases: "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." As Hendriksen explains it, "the *immediate* purpose of Christ's gifts is the ministry to be rendered by the entire flock; their *ultimate* purpose is the building up of the body of Christ, namely, the church (see on 1:22,23). See William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 1995), 198.

Focusing on Bucer and Calvin does not mean there are no other theologians who have useful insights that can enrich our understanding of ecclesiastical offices. However, since the above-mentioned men have had a profound, fundamental impact on the development of the Reformed view of office in the Dutch Reformed tradition, attention will be devoted to their input. Their influence continues to this day well beyond the Netherlands in Reformed churches that trace their historical roots back to that country and still maintain the office of elder. Taking note of the thoughts of Bucer and Calvin can enhance the awareness of the biblical insights that they have passed on and preserve the value of their contribution.

Elders are called to be overseers in the church. For them to function as they should, they not only need to possess certain necessary personal and spiritual qualifications for this office. They also need to know how to "shepherd the church of God" (Ac 20:28, cf. 1 Pe 5:2). Preparation for their work is therefore important. For growth in service to take place it is also important for them to reflect on how they are functioning. To stimulate this process, feedback about their work can help enhance the effectiveness of their ministry.

Keeping in mind the considerations mentioned above, the following questions serve as focal points for the investigation undertaken in this dissertation:

1. What does the Bible say about offices, in particular the office of elder?

2. Which insights of Bucer and Calvin are either already reflected in or could enrich the Canadian Reformed understanding of office, in particular the office of elder?

3. What information can be derived from input given by elders and congregation members to help establish what elders in the Canadian Reformed Churches need to know and be able to do in order to function effectively in their work of shepherding the flock?

Definition of Terms

In Canadian Reformed Churches, with the cooperation of the congregation, men are elected for the office of elder according to the Scriptural requirements outlined in 1 Ti 3:1-7 and Tit 1:6-9.[6] After their appointment and ordination, elders have the task of supervising the congregation to which they belong. Among the elders are men who are especially devoted to the task of preaching and teaching. Because of historical developments leading to a differentiation in offices in Reformed churches, those who are involved in preaching and teaching are not primarily referred to as elders. Instead, they are "now called ministers of the Word."[7]

The Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches describes the office of elders from the perspective of two biblical images: that of a shepherd and that of a steward. As shepherds, elders are to supervise the doctrine and life of the members, "and faithfully to visit the members of the congregation in their homes to comfort, instruct, and admonish them with the Word of God, reproving those who behave improperly." This includes giving good advice to the ministers of the Word and supervising what they teach and how they live. Elders also have the authority together to "exercise Christian

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[6] The procedure involved in the election, appointment, and ordination of elders can be found in Article 3 of the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches. See: Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches, *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter - Revised Edition* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Premier Printing Ltd., 2004), 656-657. Some general information concerning the offices of minister of the Word, elders, and deacons in the Canadian Reformed Churches can be gained by reading Articles 30 and 31 of the Belgic Confession, *Book of Praise*, 464-465.

[7] See the Form for the Ordination (or Installation) of Ministers of the Word, *Book of Praise*, 619.

discipline according to the command of Christ against those who show themselves unbelieving and ungodly and refuse to repent and shall watch that the sacraments are not profaned." In short, as shepherds their task involves tending "the flock of Christ." As "stewards of the house of God," they are to ensure that "in the congregation all things are done decently and in good order."[8]

Delimitations

In order to restrict the scope of this dissertation, attention will be devoted in particular to the task of those elders who are not ministers of the Word. Unless indicated otherwise, subsequent references to elders and eldership should therefore not be taken as including the ministers.

Elders in Canadian Reformed Churches oversee a variety of activities that cannot all be included within the scope of this study. For example, the task of elders involves taking care "that in the congregation all things are done decently and in good order."[9] Fulfilling this task requires regular meetings together as elders and also meetings with the deacons of the church. The broader task of elders in the government of the church does not, however, form a focal point in this project. Attention will largely be restricted to their role in overseeing the doctrine and life of the congregation members by means of informal contacts and official visits.

To further limit the scope of this thesis, it will be assumed that those chosen for the office of elder fulfill the Scriptural requirements outlined in 1 Ti 3:1-7 and Tit 1:6-9.

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[8] See Article 22 of the Church Order in the *Book of Praise*, 663, which largely parallels what is written about the "Mandate of the Elders" as described in the Form of the Ordination of Elders and Deacons. See the *Book of Praise*, 630. The Form also contains more specific information about the biblical background of the office of elders on pages 628-634.
[9] See once again Article 22 of the Church Order in the *Book of Praise*, 663.

The importance of those requirements will be presupposed more than that they will be subjected to extensive explanation.

An effort will be made to ascertain how elders are functioning in shepherding two rural and two city congregations in Manitoba, Canada. They belong to the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches. One survey will be used to enable congregation members (including elders) to give feedback on this topic, while elders will receive an opportunity to respond to another survey designed specifically for them.

Assumptions

In its definition of "true faith," the Heidelberg Catechism begins by saying that "True faith is a sure knowledge whereby I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in His Word."[10] This dissertation proceeds from the conviction that the Bible is the written Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit for the church of all ages (2 Ti 3:16). It is authoritative for faith and life.

God has revealed himself at different times through different people. There is continuity as well as progression in his revelation. The development in this does not make prior revelation superfluous. Prior revelation helps us to understand the fuller revelation and can also have continuing significance. For this reason this study focuses on what the Old Testament says about offices before examining New Testament data about offices in the Christian church.

The Importance of this Study

Ongoing reflection on the topic of ecclesiastical offices is important. In the introduction to *Gereformeerde Ampsbediening,* a South African publication edited by P.J.

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[10] *Book of Praise,* 481.

Rossouw, J. de Klerk lists five reasons why this is so. Although much has been written on the topic, confusion continues. People are unsure of what an ecclesiastical office is. There is a widespread devaluation of the office as institution and ministry. Nevertheless, Scripture is clear about the office. He also notes that there are significant risks associated with the administration of the office.[11]

Focusing attention on the subject of ecclesiastical office serves the gospel, "for," writes de Klerk, "whoever says 'office' points to the throne of Him who sends, points to Him who is the great office bearer, and points to the Spirit who in the fullness of His work equips for that ministry."[12] That Trinitarian perspective is well worth keeping in mind.

Since there are things that elders need to know and to be able to do in order to fulfill the tasks of their office, attention needs to be devoted to how to prepare them to do their work effectively. Scripture provides the essential basis for developing a proper understanding of God's will for the life of the church.

Reformed authors who have produced material for the benefit of office bearers have tended to write from a normative-deductive perspective. Their strength lies in investigating Scripture and deducing principles from it for the work of ministers, elders, and deacons.[13] Such authors have excelled in summarizing various insights from the Bible, offering suggestions as to how to put them into practice. However, they have

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[11] J.J. De Klerk, "Inleiding," in *Gereformeerde ampsbediening*, ed. P.J. Rossouw (Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel, 1988), 1-5.

[12] De Klerk, "Inleiding," 6. Translations from this book and other non-English resources in this dissertation are my own.

[13] C.J. de Ruijter, *Meewerken met God: Ontwerp van een Gereformeerde Praktische Theologie* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 2005), 33-37.

generally worked intuitively without gathering practical input systematically from office

bearers and from the congregations they serve.

Among Reformed churches in North America, except for a Doctor of Ministry

dissertation by G. Nederveen on the pastoral care of elderly, I have seen no record of

systematic empirical research done among elders or other congregation members to

gather data as to how the office is actually functioning in practice.[14] There is work to be

done in this area. After all, systematic attention for the empirical dimension of

ecclesiastical practice makes it possible to assess the effectiveness of the work of office

bearers and to offer suggestions or to develop plans for enhancing the effectiveness of

their work. Such suggestions or plans could be incorporated into manuals written for

office bearers.

Dr. C.J. de Ruijter, a professor of Practical Theology at the Theological

University of the Reformed Churches in Kampen, the Netherlands, attributes the

predominance of the normative-deductive approach in Reformed literature on

ecclesiastical offices to the influence of A. Kuyper. The usual point of departure became

"the ministry (*diakonia*) to which Christ calls a person with a view to the progress of the

gospel in the world and the building up of the church."[15] Scripture formed the basis for

reflection. However, the focal point was ecclesiastical office rather than the activities of

the church. This is evident in the name "Diaconiology," which Kuyper gave to the

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[14] Gijsbertus Nederveen, "Life under the Umbrella of Promise: Addressing Pastoral Needs of the Elderly from a Reformed Perspective," (D.Min. diss., McMaster University, 2001).
[15] De Ruijter, *Meewerken met God*, 27.

discipline otherwise known as "Practical Theology" in institutions where theology is taught.[16]

De Ruijter observes that the strong and sometimes exclusive focus on God's activity leaves little room "for scientific knowledge that reflects on human activity."[17] He also points out that when there is a one-sided focus on the normative aspects of Scripture, the question arises what to do in a situation where there is a gap between norm and reality. One extreme is to adjust the norm to fit reality. The other extreme is simply to continue to emphasize the norm without systematically reflecting on what is actually going on in practice. According to him, the latter approach has been taken in the realm of Diaconiology. As a result, within the framework of a normative-deductive approach, insufficient attention has been paid to practical aspects.[18]

An empirical approach brings one into the realm of methods used in the social sciences. It also opens up the possibility of reflecting on the communication processes taking place in the work of elders from perspectives developed in the realm of the social sciences. These sciences can provide tools as well as insights that can be of use in reflecting on the life of the church. However, the question arises as to how to make room for systematic reflection on the field of interaction between the biblical norms and the impact of their application.

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[16] A. Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid: Tweede Deel - Algemeen Deel*, 2e herz. druk (Kampen: Kok, 1909), 582-592; A. Kuyper, *Encyclopaedie der Heilige Godgeleerdheid: Derde Deel - Bijzonder Deel*, 2e herz. druk (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1909), 535-545. The term Diaconiology highlights the centrality of the biblical concept of service as expressed in the Greek word *"diakonein"* in regard to ecclesiastical offices. Not long ago, the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in Kampen, the Netherlands, abandoned the term in favour of Practical Theology. This is part of an effort to make room for more systematic reflection on the practical aspects of the work of ministry and the life of the church. The Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Canada, continues to use the name "Diaconiology" for this discipline.
[17] De Ruijter, *Meewerken met God*, 99, cf. 106.
[18] De Ruijter, *Meewerken met God*, 34-35, 60-61.

De Ruijter seeks to address this question, calling for more systematic attention for the empirical dimension of human activity.[19] In his book, in which he indicates that he is moving away from the approach normally taken in the Reformed tradition, he offers an alternative approach for Reformed Practical Theology, presenting a theoretical framework for this.

One does not have to agree with everything in de Ruijter's book to see that he does have a point when he stresses the need for devoting attention to what is going on in the practice of the church. A twofold approach should be developed that does justice to the norms for ecclesiastical practice and also takes into account what can be done to promote the development of the life of the church in the light of those norms.

Richard Muller makes a valid point in stating: "No one would claim, either historically or presently, that theory absolutely precedes practice. It is true, however, that theory typically precedes coherent practice—and the knowledge of biblical, historical, and systematic theology precedes coherent ministry in and for the church."[20] That insight is a determining factor in the structure of this Doctor of Ministry dissertation project.

Combining a normative-deductive approach with systematic attention for the empirical dimension of ecclesiastical practice can have a positive impact on the training of office bearers. Scripture provides norms and insights concerning elders and their work. It is of fundamental importance to make this the core of any program of instruction. However, for instruction to be effective, it is important to establish what such office bearers need to know both in theory and in practice. A systematic evaluation of reflections from elders on the challenges they have faced or continue to face in their work

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[19] De Ruijter, *Meewerken met God*, 27-28.
[20] Richard A. Muller, *The Study of Theology: From Biblical Interpretation to Contemporary Formulation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 156.

will help bring into focus which areas currently need attention. Input and feedback from

congregation members can also play a constructive role in the process of promoting the

development of elders in their work. Positive progress in this regard will help

congregations to see the continuing relevance of biblical eldership and to be receptive to

it.

The Offices in the Canadian Reformed Churches

In the Canadian Reformed Churches, the offices of minister, elder and deacon

together constitute the leadership of the local congregations.[21] Barring exceptional

circumstances, ministers continue to serve until their retirement, usually at the age of 65.

Elders and deacons, however, are elected by the congregation, appointed by the church

council (composed of ministers, elders, and deacons), and subsequently ordained to their

office for a limited period of time. Article 24 of the Church Order of the Canadian

Reformed Churches stipulates: "The elders and deacons shall serve two or more years,

according to local regulations, and a proportionate number shall retire each year. The

place of the retiring office-bearers shall be taken by others, unless the consistory with the

deacons judges that the circumstances and the benefit of the church render it advisable to

have them serve another term, or to extend their term, or to declare them immediately

eligible for re-election."[22]

In many congregations, when someone has served a term of office as an elder,

church councils customarily avoid proposing such a person's name for possible re-

election for at least one if not two years in order to provide for a period of rest. This also

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[21] Article 30 of the Belgic Confession specifies that "there should be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God and to administer the sacraments; there should also be elders and deacons who, together with the pastors, form the council of the church," in the *Book of Praise*, 464-465.
[22] *Book of Praise*, 663.

ensures that use can be made of the talents of other men deemed suitable for giving leadership and pastoral care in the congregation according to the requirements set forth in 1 Ti 3:2-12 and Tit 1:6-9.

The Need for Training Office Bearers

Since office bearers in the Canadian Reformed Churches in Manitoba generally serve for a three year term of office, it is quite possible that when their time of service expires, other men who do not have an equivalent amount of knowledge and experience will replace them. Those who have recently been ordained to such an office often testify to feeling overwhelmed and not equipped for their work. Even men who have served previously and who have certain gifts and qualifications do not necessarily know how to fulfill the obligations of their office effectively.

Ministers in the Canadian Reformed Churches have generally received four or more years of post-baccalaureate theological training and in the course of time also gain more practical experience in ministering to the needs of the congregation than the elders or deacons. For this reason, elders and deacons tend to look to the ministers for input in regard to fulfilling their tasks.

While many office bearers appreciate the general instruction that is available through books and articles, others prefer closer personal interaction through teaching and discussion. Since ministers of the Word in the Canadian Reformed Churches have theological training and are the only ones who continue to be in office, they can play a key role in this process. They can suggest books for reading. They are also in a position to help their fellow office bearers in a more direct way to grow in the understanding of their respective offices and in their abilities to fulfill them effectively.

From time to time, the churches in a particular region organize conferences for office bearers, often inviting ministers to address a particular topic. I have spoken at two conferences for elders of Reformed churches in Manitoba and have found that these office bearers are eager to reflect further on the nature of their office and the various tasks facing them. Locally in the congregation that I serve, I have also found that elders welcome specific instruction and guidance in their work in the congregation. However, such instruction and guidance often takes place in a piecemeal fashion. It would be more beneficial to do this more systematically.

Several ministers as well as elders in the Canadian Reformed Churches in Manitoba have encouraged me to develop materials for the benefit of elders in the Reformed churches. Reformed insights concerning the ecclesiastical offices and in particular that of elder continue to be important. Passing on such insights together with reflections on the empirical dimensions of the work of elders may also be of use in churches of other backgrounds that are interested in developing church leadership by means of the office of elder.

CHAPTER 2: BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL BASIS

In the Preface to his book introducing the Reformed doctrine of office, C. Trimp emphasizes the importance of having a clear view of the character of ecclesiastical office before addressing practical issues. In writing this he expresses his opposition to the dominant role of non-theological sciences in contemporary reflection on practical issues relating to office, where hardly any room is left for theological reflection on the office as a God-given mandate and instrument.[23] His words are well worth keeping in mind in our examination of the role and actual work of elders.

Trimp observes that Bible criticism has precipitated a crisis in regard to ecclesiastical office. He also notes that people are struggling to understand how church life can be organized in a biblical way in opposition to ideals cherished by those who either embrace hierarchy or who go to the opposite extreme of asserting independence of all authority. In addition to this, some are questioning the very nature of ecclesiastical office. What, if anything, can be known with certainty as being God's will?[24]

Rather than taking the office of elder for granted, we will explore what Scripture says about ecclesiastical offices in general. Within that framework, we will home in on the office of elder and ascertain how the Reformed understanding of this office has been

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[23] C. Trimp, *Ministerium: een introductie in de reformatorische leer van het ambt* (Groningen: Uitgeverij De Vuurbaak, 1982), VII-VIII.
[24] Trimp, *Ministerium,* 213-214.

applied in the course of time, in particular in the Canadian Reformed Churches. This forms the basis for approaching practical issues.[25]

The Concept of Office in the Old Testament

To gain insight in the nature of the office as such it is necessary to explore the available Scriptural data and attempt to organize the information in a systematic way. This dissertation will only give an overview of some key points regarding the concept of office and the way in which various offices in Scripture have functioned. The purpose of discussing offices other than only that of elder is to shed light on the broader context within which eldership has its place. In this way it is also possible to draw attention to some material worth pondering in connection with the office of elder.

The term "office" as such does not occur in the Old Testament. The tasks that one can describe as offices in that part of Scripture also do not form exact parallels to ecclesiastical offices today. W.S. Prinsloo therefore seeks to derive theological guidelines rather than "timeless principles" from Scripture concerning offices today.[26] There is some merit to this, although one should not discount the possibility of finding certain timeless principles in particular Old Testament passages.

Mediator

Dr. M.H.O. Kloppers points out that when God places certain individuals in the position of being a mediator between himself and people, they function as his servants. He therefore indicates that the roots of the development of office in the Old Testament

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[25] This approach is also taken by C. Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1999). On pages 211-212 he notes that although there are practical manuals for office bearers, there has not been much theological reflection on the doctrine of office. In his opinion, it is therefore good to focus on "what the office is" and "how it should function nowadays."

[26] W.S. Prinsloo, "Die Funksionering van die 'Amp' in die Ou Testament: Die sogenaamde klassieke profete," in *Gereformeerde Ampsbediening*, ed. P.J. Rossouw (Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel, 1988), 24.

can be found by focusing on the concept $^c bd$ ("to toil, work, work for, serve") in its various forms as well as related words.[27]

Kloppers notes that the idea of mediatorship was portrayed in particular by the "servant of the LORD" ($^c bd$ YHWH). He compares the development of the "servant of the LORD" concept to a spiral, with the functions of a single mediating figure at the beginning becoming differentiated and finally uniting again in one individual, while the contents progressively become richer.[28]

Passages in the Old Testament in which the concept of "the servant of the LORD" is prominent merit special attention in connection with understanding the biblical concept of office. There are connections between the role of a mediator as exemplified in the work of the "servant of the LORD" and the later work of Jesus Christ. However, the serving role of elders, leaders, judges and officials (Jos 23:2; 24:1; cf. Jos 8:33; Ezr 7:28) is also worth exploring. Such individuals were responsible for functioning as leaders, exercising authority over the people of God in his name. In doing so, their calling was to promote justice and ensure that things were conducted in a way that corresponded to God's will for his people.

The "leaders, judges and officials" tend to fall within the broader category of "elders," men known for maturity and wisdom. Focussing on each of these subcategories would introduce details that would carry us beyond the limits of this dissertation. We will therefore now pay attention to the function of elders in a more general sense.

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[27] M.H.O. Kloppers, "Die ontwikkeling van de amp in die Ou Testament," in *Gereformeerde ampsbediening*, ed. P.J. Rossouw (Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel, 1988), 9-10. In his article on the development of office in the Old Testament, he restricts his approach to what he regards as the two most important aspects: people who had the role of a mediator and how this developed, and the appearance of "the servant of the LORD" ($^c bd$ YHWH) in the Old Testament.

[28] Kloppers, "Die ontwikkeling van de amp in die Ou Testament," 12, cf. 21.

Elders: Leaders and Judges

C. Van Dam makes it clear that it is important not only to study the role of elders

in the New Testament but also to devote attention to what the Old Testament says in

order to appreciate more fully the importance of this office for the church today. This

topic deserves more attention than it has received in some literature on the subject.[29]

The Hebrew term for "elder" basically means "old man."[30] In a patriarchal

society, such a person could gain influence especially as head of a family by virtue of age

combined with experience and wisdom. This makes it understandable how the plural term

"elders" could refer to a special class of people, distinguishing them from others not only

by virtue of age but also by attributing to them a position of leadership. The Old

Testament mentions them in various ways as elders "of the people" (Ex 19:7), "of Israel"

(Ex 3:16) or "of the community" (Lev 4:15). The term can also be defined

geographically, e.g. as the elders "of the land" (Pr 31:23), or "of the town/city" (Dt

19:12).

Not every elderly person could receive recognition as an "elder" in the official

sense of the word. Van Dam summarizes the ideal characteristics of elders in Old

Testament times as "men who feared God and were trustworthy (Ex 18:21, 25), wise,

understanding, and experienced (Dt 1:13) and who were enabled by God with His Spirit

(Nu 11:16-17) to do their vital tasks of judging and ruling."[31] He sees no essential

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[29] C. Van Dam, "The Elder as Preserver and Nurturer of Life in the Covenant," in *Proceedings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, June 19-28, 1989,* ed. M. Van Beveren (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Premier Printing Ltd., 1989), 277-278.

[30] Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament,* transl. and ed. M.E.J. Richardson, [CD-ROM Edition] (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 1994-2000), s.v. זָקֵן.

[31] Van Dam, "The Elder as Preserver and Nurturer of Life in the Covenant," 283.

difference between the office of elders in the Old Testament and today in promoting the cause of God's justice, righteousness and holiness.[32]

Elders played an official role in the life of the people of God from the time of Moses onward.[33] This system of eldership provided a structure of authority as well as a framework that would enable men to take their place as time went on.

The context of various texts referring to elders indicates that they occupied a position of authority and leadership, thereby ensuring stability and order in the life of God's people. The LORD commanded Moses to take the elders with him to the king of Egypt (Ex 3:18). Together, elders approached Samuel as a decision-making body to ask him to appoint a king to lead the nation (1 Sa 8:4). Their influential role is also prominent in 2 Sa 5:3, which informs us that "When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a compact with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel."

Although the leadership of Moses as mediator was crucial in the liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt, it was not sufficient for resolving the many issues that threatened to undermine the cohesion and stability of the people. Moses chose able men to judge the people, allowing them to bring the difficult cases to his attention. There are elements in the Scriptural account of this problem and its resolution (Ex 18:13-26) that continue to be of value for the life of the church today.

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[32] C. Van Dam, "The Elder in the Gate: Some Aspects on the Judicial Task of Elders in the Old Testament and its Relevance for Today," in *Diakonia,* vol. 1, no. 4, (1988), 15-16.

[33] This conclusion is decidedly different from that drawn by R. Alastair Campbell, who emphatically denies that elders held an office. See: *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994), 65. The weakness of his position becomes apparent where he acknowledges that the term "elder" "...neither denotes particular office-holders, nor excludes them, but can easily associate with more precise official titles," and that "the holders of office may be included." The proximity of the term to other terms for special offices as well as the tasks entrusted to certain men designated as "the elders" among the people points in the direction of more than only an informal acknowledgement of their position and authority.

Seventy of the elders of Israel functioned as a cohesive group next to Moses (Ex 24:1, 9; Nu 11:16, 24-25; cf. the expression "Moses and the elders of Israel" in Nu 11:30 and Dt 27:1), sharing responsibility in leadership together with him. He reminded the people of God how this came to be, highlighting their involvement in the selection process (Dt 1:12-14). The involvement of the people in the selection of office bearers continues to be upheld in Canadian Reformed churches today.[34]

Another task of elders alongside the priests was to instruct the people in the ways of the LORD (Dt 31:9-13). The New Testament highlights the ability to teach as one of the necessary qualifications for an elder (1 Ti 3:2), thereby pointing to the continuing significance of this task in church life.

As leaders, the elders also functioned in the capacity of judges (Ex 18:26). They guarded stability and order by playing a role in the judicial process (Dt 19:12; 22:15; 25:7-10; Ru 4:1-12). Van Dam notes in connection with the work of elders today, that the Old Testament already makes it clear that elders were not called to apply the law in a cold-hearted, legalistic way, but to ensure that this was done in a spirit of mercy and love. Sins had to be dealt with in a discerning way, with a distinction being made between sins of weakness done unintentionally and those done deliberately in a spirit of defiance and rebellion (Nu 15:27-31).[35]

Van Dam also points out that the elders can be said to represent the congregation, a principle that he illustrates from the Old and New Testaments (cf. Ex 12:3 with 21;

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[34] See Article 3 of the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches, which begins: "No one shall take any office upon himself without having been lawfully called thereto." That article then goes on to outline the cooperation of the congregation in the election of office bearers under the guidance of consistory with the deacons. *Book of Praise,* 656-657.

[35] Van Dam, "The Elder in the Gate," 13-15. On page 13, in regard to the task of elders to judge righteously, he notes parallels between such concepts as righteousness or justice and steadfast love (Ps 33:5), mercy (Dan 4:27), and salvation (Isa 45:8; 46:13).

1 Sa 8:4-5 with 7; 1 Ki 8:1 with 14 and 22; cf. also Mt 18:17a).[36] This important observation is relevant for elders today in regard to their role in the exercise of church discipline. They exercise discipline in the name of Jesus Christ, but at the same time they also act on behalf of the congregation that is collectively responsible for her holiness (e.g. 1 Co 5:13; cf. Dt 13:5; 17:7,12; 19:19).

Judges

Although elders played a role in the judicial process (e.g. Dt 21:18-21), they could also share that authority with others. Priests (who were among the Levites) could make judicial pronouncements together with individuals who could possibly be described as elders but who played a specific role as judges (Dt 17:9). There were also other "officials" (*šōṭēr* in Dt 16:18; *śār* in Ezr 10:8) who could play a role in a judicial process. Jos 24:1 refers to those in authority as "the elders, leaders, judges and officials of Israel." Judges provided leadership.[37] Some were "raised up" by the LORD (Jdg 2:16,18), but there were also judges who were appointed (Dt 16:18; 1 Sa 8:1).

The task of the judges can be distinguished from that of elders, but again it should be noted that examination of their work helps illuminate part of the purpose of the work of elders nowadays. After all, the task of elders includes that of "judging." This involves not only assessing situations, but also restoring peace and order where there has been a disruption.

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[36] Van Dam, "The Elder in the Gate," 15.

[37] G. Liedke, s.v. "שׁפט *špṭ* richten," *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament: II*, ed. Ernst Jenni, Claus Westermann, München, Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1979, 1000-1003, rightly points out that the survey of literature on the concept of "judging" shows that it is not justified to restrict the meaning to judicial pronouncements. He goes on to show that establishing justice and thereby restoring peace and order is closely connected to ruling.

In church life now, elders need to remember the ecclesiastical character of their judgments in exercising spiritual oversight. They should leave room for the civil authorities to do their work as well where this is applicable. Pastoral care for a repentant criminal, for example, does not by definition negate the need for the person to face judicial consequences for certain actions.

Prophets

Prophets also played a role in giving leadership to the people of God. The Old Testament uses various terms to indicate that a particular individual was a prophet (*nābî'*). Such a person could be called a seer (either *rō'ēh* 1 Sa 9:9, or *ḥōzēh* 2 Sa 24:11, Am 7:12, terms which are hard to distinguish from each other).[38] Another expression indicating a prophet is "man of God." It was applied to Moses (Dt 33:1), but also to other prophets (1 Sa 9:7-11; 1 Ki 12:22; 17:18).

A prophet was a recipient of divine revelation. This revelation came in the form of dreams or visions or direct speech often marked by expressions such as "word(s) of the LORD" or "says the LORD" (Ge 15:1; Ex 4:28; Isa 1:11). Ex 7:1 makes it clear that a prophet was to speak on behalf of God. The message could come directly from God or in response to a matter brought before God.

Prophets did not necessarily proclaim new things, but when they functioned as instruments of God's unfolding revelation, this task was very much in the foreground (cf. Ge 49:1; Dt 18:22; Isa 42:9; etc.). The revelations given to prophets were not always clear even to themselves (e.g. Nu 12:6-8; cf. 1 Pe 1:10-12). However, in general their messages were unambiguous.

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[38] Koehler, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. נָבִיא.

Prinsloo warns against using Old Testament texts, in particular those regarding the prophets, in a biblicistic way as a model for the functioning of ecclesiastical office today. After examining the task of Old Testament prophets, he highlights the following for further reflection. A true prophet brings the word of the LORD to bear on all aspects of life, addressing all kinds of people with a specific message of judgment and salvation. "He proclaims the ancient truths in a new, relevant way," using "all the methods of communication of his time," or "even unorthodox ones if so commanded by the LORD and if the situation calls for it."[39] Reflecting on this can serve to remind elders to look at the full scope of the lives of those entrusted to their care and to be focused and creative as they bring God's Word to people of differing backgrounds.

Priests and Levites

The role of priests in the life of God's people in Old Testament times was less "charismatic" than that of prophets, in that their office did not depend on them being moved in a direct way by the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, their ministry also rested on divine authorization and their anointing testified to the work of the Holy Spirit who equipped them for service.

In the book of Genesis, the patriarchs are described as engaging in various priestly acts (e.g. Ge 8:20; 22:2). The first specific reference to a priest, however, is Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem (Ge 14:18). In the authorization to fulfill his office as priest, Christ's appointment is comparable to that of Melchizedek (Ps 110:4, cf. Heb 7:14-21). He did not have to depend on being a descendant from a line of priests (Heb 7:14-16). In that regard, Melchizedek functions as a forerunner of Jesus Christ.

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[39] Prinsloo, "Die Funksionering van die 'Amp,'" 34, 37-38.

The priests who served in the tabernacle and later in the temple descended from Aaron, who was from the tribe of Levi (Ex 29:27-30). They functioned as mediators between God and his people in bringing sacrifices (Ex 29; Lev 8). Their ministry has been fulfilled through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ (Heb 7:18-26; 10:1-18).

Connections can be drawn between the office of priest and the ministry of Jesus Christ as priest. However, certain connections can also be drawn between the designation of the people of God as priests in Old Testament times (Ex 19:6; cf. Isa 61:6) and a similar reference to the "priesthood of all believers" in the New Testament (cf. Ro 12:1; 1 Pe 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 12:1; 20:6).

John Hall Elliot explains the promise that Israel will be "a kingdom of priests" (Ex 19:6) as "a vow that she will then enjoy the very nearness of JHWH and the status of holiness which only a priest shares." Of course, this is contingent upon them obeying God's commands.[40] In 1 Pe 2:5 and 9, we encounter the fulfillment of the promise once given to Israel. Through Christ, the church has become a "body of priests" who offer sacrifices to God. Their sacrifices involve obeying God's commands, glorifying him, and seeking what is good for others.[41] Elders in the church today do well to remind the congregation of this task.

J. Baehr, referring to a study by E. Best, notes that various terms originally associated with the Levites are applied in the New Testament to Christians. Words such as "sprinkled" and "washed" were used in connection with the consecration of priests (Heb 10:22; cf. Ex 29:21; Lev 8:6, 20); "firstborn" is reminiscent of the original position

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[40] John Hall. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy: An exegetical examination of 1 Peter 2:4-10 and the phrase* βασίλειον ίεράτευμα, Supplements to Novum Testamentum, vol. XII (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 55, cf. 62.

[41] Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy*, 168, cf. 197-198.

of the Levites (Heb 12:23); and Christians have an "altar" (Heb 13:10).[42] Keeping such

references in mind can serve to guard against attributing exclusively to special office

bearers what the New Testament associates with the "priesthood of all believers." Elders

need to instruct and encourage the members of the congregation to live as people who

have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. They are to stimulate them in fulfilling

their priestly calling as members of the body of Christ.

The New Testament emphasizes the priestly office of all believers. However, this

does not mean there is no room for reflection on connections between the task of priests

and Levites and ecclesiastical offices today. The Levites occupied a special position in

Israel (Dt 10:8-9). There was a spiritual as well as an administrative aspect to their work.

Together with the priests among them, they had the task of teaching the people the law of

God and applying it to their circumstances (2 Ch 19:8-10). Levites could also function as

"officials and judges" (1 Ch 23:4).

Levites played a role in taking care of the tabernacle and its furnishings, including

its transportation, as well as the care of the temple and the temple treasury in later times

(cf. Nu 1:50-51; 1 Ch 23:4; 26:20-28). Dt 10:8 also mentions them as being authorized

"to stand before the LORD to minister and to pronounce blessings in his name." That,

however, could perhaps refer to the priests among them (cf. Nu 6:23-27).

The task of priests clearly involved more than bringing sacrifices. They also had

authority to give guidance from the LORD through the Urim and Thummim (Ex 28:30; Nu

27:21; 1 Sa 28:6). In addition to this, priests were responsible for preserving the law (Dt

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[42] See the article "Priest, High Priest" by J. Baehr, in Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, translated, with additions and revisions, from the German *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament,* edited by Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther and Hans Bietenhard (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Regency Reference Library/Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 3:38.

17:18), and for teaching and applying it (e.g. Dt 17:8-13; 24:8; 33:10; Mal 2:7). The tasks

of the priests and Levites should be kept in mind for the sake of comparison with the task

of office bearers (specifically elders) in the New Testament.

Kings

A survey of what the Old Testament teaches concerning office would be

incomplete without a reference to kingship. Kingship cannot be understood apart from

God, the sovereign Creator and ruler of all of creation. The first indication of the concept

of "kingship" in connection with people can be found in the book of Genesis, where they

receive the mandate to "rule" over all of creation (the verb *rāḏāh* in Ge 1:26 is later also

used for the rule of kings).[43]

The task of being a ruler under God was distorted after Adam and Eve's fall into

sin. There were kings among the nations well before the institution was introduced in the

history of Israel, with some kings even attributing divinity to themselves. Moses foresaw

that God's people would want a king like the nations around them (Dt 17:14; cf. 1 Sa 8:5)

and highlighted the proper perspective on kingship by making it clear that the LORD

should choose a person to occupy this office (Dt 17:15; cf. Ge 17:6).

Kings in Israel were to be theocratic, ruling by the grace of God on behalf of God.

This was often not the case. After a brief period of blossoming in the time of David and

Solomon, kings in the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah only infrequently lived up to

their calling.

Kingship in Israel and Judah ended when the people went into exile.

Nevertheless, the concept of kingship among the people of God did not disappear. The

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[43] Willem A. VanGemeren, s.v. "King, Kingship," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1988), ed. Walter A. Elwell, and Barry J. Beitzel.

expectation of the Messiah was closely connected with the restoration of the Davidic king.[44] That would be Jesus Christ, the king whose kingdom would be established forever (2 Sa 7:10; cf. Ps 2; 72; 110; Isa 9:1-7; 11:1-9; etc.). His authority as the incarnate Son of God is absolute, but also beneficent to those submitting to his rule (Ps 2:12; 72:7; Mt 28:18-20).

The Old Testament gives no indication of a future messianic king other than Jesus Christ. This has implications for the understanding of any subsequent form of authority and its exercise in the life of the church. Specifically, elders have a ruling function in the church under Jesus Christ the King.

The Concept of Office in the New Testament

The Centrality of Jesus Christ

It is important keep Jesus Christ in mind when seeking to understand what ecclesiastical offices entail. The New Testament points to him as the promised "servant of the LORD" (Lk 4:17-20; 24:25-27, 44-47; Ac 8:30-35), the Messiah. He is the incarnate Son of God, sent by the Father (Jn 3:16) and anointed by the Holy Spirit (Isa 61:1; Lk 4:18; cf. Mt 3:16) to fulfill a task on earth. This Trinitarian perspective on the office of Christ is rightly stressed in the Heidelberg Catechism when discussing the reason why the Son of God is called Christ, that is, Anointed.[45]

The Threefold Office of Christ

P.J. Rossouw stresses that the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king can only be understood against the background of the Old Testament. Offices in the Old Testament are connected and their functions sometimes overlap. The offices of

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[44] Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt*, 269-270.
[45] Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches, *Book of Praise*, 485, Lord's Day 12, Q. & A. 31.

prophet, priest and king originate from the coming Christ. Those offices also found their fulfillment in him.[46]

From the beginning of his ministry onward, Christ presented himself to his people as *prophet,* preaching about the coming of the kingdom of heaven (Mt 4:17). Like other prophets, he made it clear that his message was "from God" (Jn 7:17). His listeners understood that there was a special depth to his words (Jn 1:18; 15:15). He spoke with authority unlike that of others (Mt 7:29; 9:6). He proclaimed the coming of the Kingdom of God and taught his followers how to live as citizens of the Kingdom (Mt 4:17, 23; 5:3). The theme of the Kingdom resonated throughout his earthly ministry until the time of his ascension to heaven (Ac 1:3) and later became an integral part of the proclamation of the gospel (Ac 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31).

Jesus Christ was also *priest,* but not in the line of Aaron. Like the priesthood of Melchizedek in Old Testament times, the priesthood of Jesus Christ was based on divine appointment (Heb 5:5-6, 5:10 and Heb 7). As the incarnate Son of God, he atoned for the sins of his people by offering himself as the perfect sacrifice (Heb 2:17; 7:27). He also continues as priest, interceding for his people with the Father (Heb 7:25).

Thirdly, Jesus Christ is *king* of his people. The coming of the Messiah as king is a familiar theme in the Old Testament. That Jesus is the promised king was already announced by the angel Gabriel before he was born (Lk 1:32-33). He presented himself as king to his people when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey (Mt 21:1-11). Near the end, he faced Pontius Pilate and affirmed that he is king (Mt 27:11). He also made it clear that his kingship is not comparable to that of anyone else on earth: "My kingdom is not of

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[46] P.J. Rossouw, "Die Amp van Christus," in *Gereformeerde Ampsbediening,* ed. P.J. Rossouw (Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel, 1988), 40-41.

this world" (Jn 18:36). After being crucified as "the King of the Jews" (Mt 27:37), he

arose from the dead. Before his ascension into heaven, he stressed his kingship to his

followers (Mt 28:18-20).

C. Graafland speaks of two aspects in connection with the kingdom of God as

proclaimed by Jesus. It arrived with his coming (Lk 17:21), but the kingdom is also

something in the future. Initially it is spiritual and personal, with reconciliation as a

central element. However, the kingdom is also associated with "healing, liberation, and

renewal," extending to the entire world and embracing all of life. [47] This perspective

should motivate office bearers to focus not only on the theme of reconciliation with God

in their dealings with congregation members, but also on the broader scope of Christ's

present and future work.

Continuing Relevance

The threefold office of Christ cannot be correlated in an exclusive way with

specific offices in the church today (e.g. the minister of the Word as "prophet," the elder

as "king," and the deacon in a "priestly" ministry of mercy), since the biblical foundation

for this is absent and the three aspects can be related to each one of the offices.[48]

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[47] Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt,* 271-273.

[48] Trimp, *Ministerium,* 111-112. Trimp raises further objections on pp. 113-115. Cf. also pp. 12-13 and 74-79. Such objections are worth noting, since the idea continues to be propagated among Reformed churches that there is an analogy between the offices of prophet, priest, and king, and that of ministers, elders, and deacons, today. H. De Moor, in his dissertation "Equipping the Saints: A Church Political Study of the Controversies Surrounding Ecclesiastical Office in the Christian Reformed Church in North America 1857-1982," (Theologische Academie uitgaande van de Johannes Calvijn-Stichting te Kampen, no date), 210, describes the idea of ecclesiastical offices as an ecclesiological extension of Christ's threefold office as "a novelty introduced toward the end of the nineteenth century by Kuyper and Bavinck." He notes further that it was neither Kuyper nor Bavinck's intent to seek an exclusive correlation between the threefold office of Christ and three specific ecclesiastical offices. In practice, however, this tendency did manifest itself and elicited a negative reaction. The concept has been strongly criticized for not being rooted in Scripture and tending to make a rigid system of three offices whereas the Bible describes more offices. It has also been pointed out that ministers of the Word and elders are both essentially "overseers," sharing the same office although with differing responsibilities. Nevertheless, De Moor does plea for understanding that there is value in remembering that Christ, who has a threefold office, has chosen to work through office bearers,

However, the concept of Jesus Christ as prophet, priest, and king of his people continues to be relevant for the church today, also in regard to understanding the role of office bearers in the church who are special instruments in his hands.

Rossouw emphasizes in regard to Christ as prophet, priest and king, that one aspect should not be elevated above the others.[49] He also refers to J.A. Heyns who lists four dimensions in the work of Christ as office bearer, relating these to the Spirit, the Kingdom, the church, and a relational dimension in which Christ's work directs people to God (vertical), their neighbours (horizontal), and the future.[50] These remarks are well worth pondering in connection with the work of office bearers who are now called to work in the church as servants of Jesus Christ.

While there is merit in Rossouw's desire to see justice done to all three aspects of Christ's office, it is important to note that the kingship of Jesus Christ does figure prominently in the mandate that he gave to his apostles before his ascension to heaven. As indicated earlier, before ascending to heaven, Jesus proclaimed his authority as king: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (Mt 28:18). He has not only divine power but also the authority to exercise that power as our Mediator. He enlisted the service of the apostles to proclaim his kingship (Mt 28:19-20).

In Chapter XXX,1, the Westminster Confession of Faith elaborates on how Christ continues to execute his office as king through office bearers in the church today. "The

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making them his "organs," through whom he is present and at work. For the entire discussion, see pages 205-224. In a more recent publication, Daniel R. Hyde advances the same analogy between Christ's threefold office and three ecclesiastical offices in his chapter "Rulers and Servants: The Nature of and Qualifications for the Offices of Elder and Deacon," in *Called to Serve: Essays for Elders and Deacons*, ed. Michael G. Brown (Grandville, Michigan:2006), 4-6. He acknowledges that "there are differences as well" and "not a one-to-one correspondence" (p. 6), and his further remarks actually undermine his initial position, showing that the idea of an analogy cannot really be maintained.

[49] Rossouw, "Die Amp van Christus," 42.

[50] Rossouw, "Die Amp van Christus," 43.

Lord Jesus, as King and Head of His Church, hath therein appointed a government, in

the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate. (Isa. 9:6-7, 1 Tim. 5:17,

1 Thess. 5:12, Ac 20:17-18, Heb. 13:7, 17, 24, 1 Cor. 12:28, Matt. 28:18-20)."[51]

This line of thought is developed in Question and Answer 45 of the Westminster

Larger Catechism as follows:

> Christ executeth the office of a king, in calling out of the world a people to
> himself, (Acts 15:14-16, Isa. 55:4-5, Gen. 49:10, Ps. 110:3) and giving them
> officers, (Eph. 4:11-12, 1 Cor. 12:28) laws, (Isa. 33:22) and censures, by which
> he visibly governs them; (Matt. 18:17-18, 1 Cor. 5:4-5) in bestowing saving grace
> upon his elect, (Acts 5:31) rewarding their obedience, (Rev. 22:12, Rev. 2:10) and
> correcting them for their sins, (Rev. 3:19) preserving and supporting them under
> all their temptations and sufferings, (Isa. 63:9) restraining and overcoming all
> their enemies, (1 Cor. 15:25, Ps. 110:1-2) and powerfully ordering all things for
> his own glory, (Rom. 14:10-11) and their good; (Rom. 8:28) and also in taking
> vengeance on the rest, who know not God, and obey not the gospel. (2 Thess.
> 1:8-9, Ps. 2:8-9).[52]

Indeed, the ministry of Jesus Christ continues to be foundational for all other

ministry in the church of Jesus Christ. As king, he gives gifts of leadership to the church

by the power of the Holy Spirit. Those gifts can be recognized and put to use in an

orderly way in his name and on his behalf. This connection with Christ gives depth to the

sense of calling and commission that every office bearer should have.

Gifts and Offices

In Eph 4:7, the apostle Paul speaks of the ascended Christ having given "grace"

(*charis*) to the members of the church. In chapter 4:11 Paul makes it clear that this grace

includes the gift of people in specific positions of leadership: apostles, prophets,

evangelists, pastors and teachers. The list is not exhaustive. Passages such as Ro 12:4-8

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[51] *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996). Although the Westminster Standards are not acknowledged as one of the official confessional documents of the Canadian Reformed Churches, they are held in honour as part of the heritage of the Reformation.
[52] *The Westminster Larger Catechism: With Scripture Proofs* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996).

and 1 Co 12:4-11 make it clear that leadership is only one of a variety of gifts in the church.

When discussing any "office" in the church, it must be remembered that without the concomitant spiritual gifts, the position becomes meaningless and the task remains unfulfilled. Perhaps this is why the more concrete Greek word for "gift" in the New Testament (*charisma*, e.g. in Ro 12:6; 1 Co 12:4), is preferred above the more abstract concept of "office."

C.J.H. Venter points out that the gifts of the Spirit given to the church include the offices of overseer, elder, and deacons, but also "central aspects in the functioning of the offices": teaching, admonition, pastoral work, and leadership. The gifts come from Christ as Head of the church, which is his body. Various texts such as those in Ro 12:1-8, 1 Corinthians 12 and 4:9-13 simply describe the gifts as coming from God, placing them "within the broader context of God's total work of creation."[53]

Some theologians have suggested that there is a tension between gifts and ecclesiastical office. In their opinion, the church first functioned charismatically, with various gifts being exercised freely. From this point of view, texts that refer specifically to offices such as elders and deacons are explained as a later development in which the dynamic character of the beginning ebbed and was replaced by more static forms.

Du Rand observes that such viewpoints, which continue to this day, fail to take into account that the Holy Spirit is responsible for the spiritual character as well as the orderly organization of the church. As can be seen in Ephesians 4, office bearers are gifts given to the church. Accordingly, he stresses that "any dualism between the spiritual and

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[53] C.J.H. Venter, "Amp en ampsdraer - Gesigspunte uit die Nuwe Testament," in *Gereformeerde Ampsbediening*, ed. P.J. Rossouw (Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel, 1988), 96-98.

the organizational is foreign to the Paulinic concept of church."[54] He rejects the idea that there is either an antithesis or even a tension between gifts and office, pointing for example to Ephesians 4, where office bearers are described as gifts given to the church.[55]

Van Bruggen argues from a historical perspective against the supposed movement from a charismatic stage toward the development of ecclesiastical offices in an early phase of the history of the Christian church. He notes that elders were already appointed in each church during Paul's first missionary journey (Ac 14:23, cf. 20:17, 28).[56] Van Bruggen also points out that details about "functions and offices, workers and helpers" were not needed because the congregations were already familiar with them. The pastoral letters focus on situations where there are problems that need to be resolved for the sake of the body of Christ.[57]

Van Bruggen therefore argues against construing a tension between gifts and office. The apostle Peter does not do this (cf. 1 Pe 4:10 and 5:1-2). The apostle Paul does not do this either. That can be concluded from Php 1:2 when viewed in the broader context of that letter, as well as from 1 Ti 4:14, where mention is made of a "gift" that Timothy received when "the body of elders" laid their hands on him. The term "gift" is broader than the tasks associated with a particular ecclesiastical office, but also includes such offices.[58]

Du Rand stresses that gifts and office are connected christologically and pneumatologically. The Holy Spirit gives them for the sake of preparing the congregation

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[54] J.A. du Rand, "Charisma en amp - 'n Pauliniese eksegetiese verkenning," in *Gereformeerde Ampsbediening*, ed. P.J. Rossouw (Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel, 1988), 81-82.
[55] du Rand, "Charisma en amp," 92.
[56] J. van Bruggen, *Ambten in de apostolische kerk: Een exegetisch mozaïek* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1984), 143.
[57] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 144.
[58] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 141-142, cf. 162.

of Christ for works of service (Eph 4:12). Those are "spiritual qualifications which God gives to believers through the Holy Spirit on the basis of Jesus Christ." The functions of ecclesiastical office are not separate from, but part of the gifts of the Spirit for building up the body of Christ.[59] They can be called "the continuing, orderly, coordinating charismatic work of the Spirit in the congregation," says du Rand. This application of the gifts is essential for building up and equipping the living body of Christ.[60]

Such observations are crucial for shaping the self-awareness of elders in regard to their understanding of their role in the church of Jesus Christ. They not only have authority under Jesus Christ, who has called them to service; Christ has also equipped them with specific gifts through the Holy Spirit for their special ministry in the body of Christ.

Offices as Forms of Service

As in the Old Testament, the New Testament does not have one specific term for "office," nor does it offer a clear blueprint outlining exactly how church life is to be organized today. Rather, as Versteeg explains it, we receive "a point of orientation for all time."[61] It is therefore essential for us to continue to pay attention to what the New Testament teaches us in this regard. Biblical principles remain unchanging, but creativity may be needed to ensure the validity of ways in which they are applied.

A number of connections between Old Testament and New Testament terminology relating to office can be observed. The term *ᵃbōdāh* is used for "work" in a general sense, but also in connection with "service" rendered to the Lord by the priests

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[59] du Rand, "Charisma en amp," 81, cf. 89.
[60] du Rand, "Charisma en amp," 93.
[61] J.P. Versteeg, "Het karakter van het ambt volgens Efeziërs 4:7-16," in *Gereformeerde ampsbediening*, ed. P.J. Rossouw (Pretoria: N.G. Boekhandel, 1988), 71.

and Levites (e.g. Nu 3:7; 1 Ch 23:24; 2 Ch 8:14) as well as by temple servants who assisted the Levites (Ezr 8:20). In 1 Ch 25:1, the term is even used for the "ministry of prophesying" fulfilled by sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun, but could also apply to work done by "gatekeepers" (1 Ch 26:8; 2 Ch 35:15).[62]

New Testament equivalents to "service" are used in a broader sense of all believers, but they can also be found in reference to Christ or special office bearers in the church: *douleuō*, "perform the duties of a slave, serve" (Gal 5:13), *diakonia*, "service" (Ac 1:17, 25; 20:24; 21:19; Ro 11:13; 2 Co 4:1; 2 Ti 4:5; cf. *diakonos*, "servant" (Mt 20:26; Col 1:23, 25; and *diakoneō*, "serve" (Mt 20:28), *leitourgia* "service" (Php 2:30; 2 Co 9:12; Heb 8:6, cf. *leitourgeō*, "perform a public service, serve in a (public) office" (Ac 13:2; Ro 15:27), *latreia*, "service / worship (of God)" (Ro 9:4; 12:1; Heb 9:1; cf. *latreuō*, "serve," i.e. "the carrying out of religious duties" (Mt 4:10 [Dt 6:13]; Ro 1:9; Heb 8:5; 13:10), and *oikonomia*, "commission, task" (1 Co 9:17; Col 1:25).[63] This list, which is not exhaustive, gives an impression of the variety of ways in which the work of office bearers can be indicated.

[62] Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, electronic ed., (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), s.v. עֲבֹדָה.
[63] See: Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains*, Electronic ed. of the 2nd edition (New York: United Bible societies, 1996); Frederick William Danker, rev. and ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature: Third Edition (BDAG)*, based on Walter Bauer's Griechish-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur, Sixth Edition, ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann, and on previous English editions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), electronic ed. and H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, H. S. Jones and others, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) , s.v. In "Charisma en amp," 79, du Rand points out that the Greek word *oikonomia*, that can mean ministry or administration, may be connected to the Old Testament terms for an appointment or office, *peqŭddāh*, implying oversight, and *mô'ēd*, which refers to an appointed time, place or meeting.

According to du Rand, the New Testament concept of office is unique because of its service-oriented character and its content is connected to the work of the Spirit and Christ. He notes that "all the activities that were important for the upbuilding and equipping of the congregation are referred to by the terms *diakoniai* and *charismata.*"[64] Elders therefore need to keep in mind that as people who are gifted by the Holy Spirit, they are servants of Jesus Christ and must fulfill their task with humility.

Versteeg points out that "every office is a service, but not every service is an office." That distinction is an important one. The work of office bearers is "a service of some in the church for the benefit of the service of all others in the church. The service of all in the church must be led."[65]

The depiction of offices in Scripture is not as diffuse as some suggest. It is true that sometimes various gifts or functions are simply listed, but specific offices are indicated as well. There are gifts given to all believers (Eph 4:7), but as Versteeg explains, there are also gifts given to some to ensure that the gifts given to all will function properly. The verb "gave" in Eph 4:8 occurs in the aorist form and is used again in 4:11 to emphasize that just like the gifts given to all believers (4:7), the gift of office bearers has also been given in a definitive way and similarly continues to be important for the structure of the church.[66]

In Eph 4:11, the apostle Paul lists various office bearers that Christ gives to the church, thereby highlighting the significance of their tasks. They should not merely be seen as people who have been chosen by the church or who have emerged as leaders by virtue of natural gifts. Rather, they fulfill positions in the church of Jesus Christ by virtue

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[64] du Rand, "Charisma en amp," 80.
[65] Versteeg, "Het karakter van het ambt volgens Efeziërs 4:7-16," 49.
[66] Versteeg, "Het karakter van het ambt volgens Efeziërs 4:7-16," 53.

of his work.[67] Lincoln appropriately suggests it would be better to translate the definite

article preceding the various nouns as an article belonging to them: "it was he who gave

the apostles, the prophets," etc.[68]

Apostles

When listing the gifts Jesus Christ has given to the church, Paul mentions the

apostles first (Eph 4:11). Next to the apostles, Christ also gave "some to be prophets,

some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers." The list is not exhaustive.

"Pastors and teachers" can be interpreted in connection with the office of elder, but there

is no reference to deacons.

The term "apostle" literally means "delegate, envoy," and "messenger."[69] It is

used to point to Christ (Heb 3:1), but more commonly to refer to prominent leaders in the

early Christian church who proclaimed the gospel: not only "the twelve," but also others

such as Barnabas and Paul (Ac 14:14), and Andronicus and Junias (Ro 16:7). Van

Bruggen points out that "the twelve" occupy a special place among a larger group of

apostles (1 Co 15:5, 7). The language used in Luke 10:1 gives the impression that the

seventy (or seventy two, depending on which manuscripts are correct) "others" who have

been "appointed" are also apostles.[70]

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[67] On the basis of various texts, such as Mt 18:17, Strauch rightly claims in his book on *Biblical Eldership* that "elders represent the people as leading members from among the people" (p. 113). However, elders receive their gifts and authority from Jesus Christ and also represent him in their ministry. Strauch emphasizes the headship of Christ on p. 115, for example, but undermines the significance of that position by saying "The congregation governs itself through the congregational elders" (p. 293). Beyond the remarks made on p. 210, further exegesis of Eph 4:7-16 would have shed more light on Jesus Christ as the one who gives office bearers to the church "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph 4:12). He is the source of their authority.

[68] Andrew T. Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*, vol. 42 (Dallas: Word Books, 2002), 249, in explaining Eph 4:11f.

[69] Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. ἀπόστολος.

[70] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 10,14,16-18, 20.

In Ac 1:21-22 the apostle Peter indicated that someone had to be chosen to replace Judas. This person was to be a "witness" together with the other eleven apostles concerning Jesus Christ: "one of the men who have been with us the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from John's baptism to the time when Jesus was taken up from us." Being a witness of Jesus Christ involved a very unique task. As ambassadors of Christ, these men were commissioned to give their testimony concerning Jesus Christ whom they had seen and heard personally (cf. Ac 1:8,22; 13:31).

Ignatius distinguished between the authority of the apostles and that of later elders. "The apostles had the right to command *(diatassesthai)*, but even Ignatius did not have such a right (Trall. III 3; Rom. IV 3)." A remark like this and similar remarks in other early Greek Christian documents highlight the unique authority of the apostles and make it clear that apostleship was not something transferable to other people.[71]

Although the office of the apostles was unique, the apostles could also be called "elders" (1 Pe 5:1; 2 Jn 1; 3 Jn 1). This shows us that eldership is a broad category that can embrace a variety of functions.

Prophets

Developments subsequent to the ascension of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit show that the apostles were not the only ones in the church having leadership and exercising authority. The apostle Paul states that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone" (Eph 2:20; cf. 3:5; 4:11; 1 Co 12:28-29 and Rev 18:20).

Van Bruggen distinguishes between the "apostles and prophets" as follows: "the apostles brought the gospel everywhere with the power of the Holy Spirit and the

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[71] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 60, cf. 62.

prophets worked on building believers up further through revelations. Many of these prophets used to be disciples of Jesus (Ac 2:14-18; 11:27; 15:22, 32)." Unlike the apostles, they did not do miracles (2 Co 12:12). Their work could have an impact on unbelievers (1 Co 14:23-25), but it was not primarily focused on reaching out to the world.[72]

Prophets in the church as described in the New Testament received special revelations from God (1 Co 14:30). These revelations enabled them to disclose what was normally not known to people. They could fathom mysteries and knowledge (1 Co 13:2) and were able to expose the secrets of a person's heart (1 Co 14:24-25). Their primary task seems to have been that of instruction and encouragement (Ac 15:32; 1 Co 14:31). In this way people would be given direction as well as strength and comfort, and the church would be edified (1 Co 14:3-4, cf. 30-31). They could also speak about future events (Ac 11:27-28; 21:10-11).

The gift of prophecy mentioned in the New Testament after Pentecost seems to have been fairly widespread among men and women in the churches (Ac 13:1; 15:32; 19:6; 21:9-10; Ro 12:6; etc.). Some prophets may have functioned as office bearers (e.g. Ac 13:1, "prophets and teachers"). However, this would not necessarily always have been the case (1 Co 14:26-39). Offices in the church cannot function properly without the presence of the required gifts. However, not every gift necessarily requires an office in order to occupy a legitimate place in the life of the church.

Evangelists

The Greek word for "evangelist" literally means "proclaimer of the gospel." It occurs in Eph 4:11 in a general sense, as well as in Ac 21:8 in reference to Philip and in

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[72] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 23, 34.

2 Ti 4:5, where Timothy is addressed.[73] According to Versteeg, the consensus is that

evangelists worked closely together with the apostles. In 1 Th 3:2, Paul refers to

Timothy, who is an evangelist, as "God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of

Christ." Titus seems to have done similar work (Tit 1:5). The same applies to other

"fellow workers" of Paul (2 Co 8:18; Col 4:11; Php 4:3). There may therefore have been

more evangelists than the infrequent use of the term suggests.[74]

Versteeg concludes that evangelists fulfilled an official ministry, since Paul

describes their activity in Eph 4:16 in terms of "tendons" or "ligaments" (*haphai*) in the

body of Christ. Although they were closely associated with the work of the apostles, they

did not have to be eyewitnesses of Christ and their role does not have to be limited to the

initial phase of apostolic activity. Their role continued as missionaries, active in a

subsequent phase of church life.[75] Those called evangelists were not directly designated

and sent out by Christ like the apostles. However, they did do foundational work in

various regions, laying a basis on which local pastors could build.[76]

Pastors and Teachers = Elders?

The expression "pastors and teachers" (Eph 4:11) is connected by the definite

article that precedes the term "pastors," which is followed by the word "and." This gives

the impression of a reference to one particular group of people rather than two separate

groups. Various explanations of the words have been offered. Some have suggested that

the pastors are those called elders or overseers in other passages, and that "teachers" is a

synonym for the same men. After all, a pastor is one who tends sheep, and that is

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[73] Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. εὐαγγελιστής.
[74] Versteeg, "Het karakter van het ambt volgens Efeziërs 4:7-16," 59-60.
[75] Versteeg, "Het karakter van het ambt volgens Efeziërs 4:7-16," 60.
[76] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 35.

definitely a task of someone who is an "elder" or "overseer" (*presbuteros* in Ac 20:17,

episkopos in Ac 20:28; similarly in 1 Pe 5:1-2; cf. Tit 1:5-6, where the term "elder" is

used, while in vs. 7 Paul speaks of the elder as an "overseer"). The apostle Paul makes it

clear that an overseer or elder must be "able to teach" (1 Ti 3:2). In addition to being

pastors, elders are indeed therefore also teachers capable of giving coherent instruction.[77]

A.T. Lincoln, who mentions the possibility of regarding the "pastors and

teachers" of Eph 4:11 as synonyms for the same men, indicates that "it is more likely that

they were overlapping functions, but that while almost all pastors were also teachers, not

all teachers were also pastors."[78] The word "teachers" could therefore be a term

indicating a separate group working in conjunction with the pastors. The fact that the

term "teachers" occurs separately elsewhere in the New Testament is worth reflecting on

in this connection.

It is also plausible that while the expression "pastors and teachers" in Eph 4:11

could refer to people who are elders, different tasks or functions among them are being

highlighted. Some people are more gifted than others in the ability to understand the

Scriptures and to teach this to others. Does such a gift not also lead to extra

responsibilities within the body of believers, as seems to be indicated by Paul in 1 Ti

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[77] K.H. Rengstorf, s.v. "διδάσκαλος" in Gerhard Friedrich, Gerhard Kittel, eds. and Geoffrey William Bromiley transl. and ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1964 repr. 1966), vol. 2:152, refers to teachers as "a leading group in the early Christian community (Ac. 13:1; 1 C. 12:28f.; Eph 4:11; cf. also Jm. 3:1)." This would seem to indicate they form a separate group. However, on page 158 he indicates that "if in Eph. 4:11 the common article makes it plain that the διδάσκαλοι are identical with the ποιμένες, this lies in the nature of the case; for the → ποιμήν is the one who is responsible for the life of the community, and therefore διδάσκειν in the widest sense is part of his office."

[78] Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*, 250. Venter also indicates that the expression "pastors and teachers" does not necessarily have to mean the two are identical. There could simply be a close connection between the two tasks. See "Amp en ampsdraer - Gesigspunte uit die Nuwe," 98-99.

5:17, Ro 12:7, Gal 6:6 and 1 Th 5:12 (see also Jas 3:1)? They may even have received a certain measure of special training in order to fulfill their tasks properly (2 Ti 2:2).

Elders already had a prominent role in Old Testament times. As mentioned earlier, they had to be capable of understanding and applying the law of God. They could also be called upon to give advice where needed. Next to them were the Levites and especially the priests among the Levites who had the task of teaching the law (Dt 17:11; 2 Ch 15:3; 31:4; Ezr 7:10, 25; Eze 7:26; Mi 3:11; Mal 2:7). The priests could be regarded as "specialists."

The New Testament makes no mention of certain individuals occupying the position of "priests" in the church. The task of bringing sacrifices for reconciliation was fulfilled by the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. What did remain, however, was the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Co 5:18-20). This distinct task in the New Testament church involves teaching.

It is striking that in Ro 15:16 the apostle Paul describes his work as "a minister (*leitourgos*) of Christ Jesus" as "the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God" (*hierourgounta to euangelion tou theou*). The use of such language suggests a parallel between the Old Testament priesthood and the ministry of the Word. It continues to be the primary task of ministers of the Word to call people to be reconciled to God and to teach them how to live as people who have been reconciled to God. This gives grounds for distinguishing "teaching elders" from "ruling elders," with the latter group having a task more comparable to that of the Old Testament elders.[79]

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[79] C. Van Dam focuses on this in his speech: "The Preacher as Priest," in *Clarion,* 57, no. 23 (2008): 590-593. He also capably argues that "ministers of the gospel ... are the priests and Levites of today" in *The Elder: Today's Ministry Rooted in all of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P&R Publishing, 2009), 112.

Thought can also be given to connections between the task of the priests and Levites who were called to lead in prayer and praise, and the ministry of public prayer to which Paul calls Timothy (1 Ti 2:1-2). This can be applied to those called to lead the church in worship today. Elders in general can be involved in this task, but it is chiefly the responsibility of those who are now called "ministers of the Word."

The expression "ministers of the Word" is worth reflecting on. It is rooted in the New Testament. The "ministry of the Word" was a primary task of the apostles (Ac 6:4). However, Paul applies the term "servant" or "minister" (*diakonos*) not only to himself, but also to such men as Epaphras (Col 1:7), Tychicus, (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7), and Timothy, (1 Ti 4:6, cf. 1 Th 3:2). Like Paul, they are "ministers of a new covenant" (2 Co 3:6). J. De Jong highlights texts such as these to distinguish ministers of the Word as a special group having a "third office" next to that of elders and deacons, although he does admit that it is possible on the grounds of Scripture to argue for two offices instead of three.[80]

Paul writes in a general way about special care for those who spend extra time teaching (Gal 6:6; cf. also 1 Ti 5:17, where he specifically mentions elders "whose work is preaching and teaching."). This category of "teaching elders" is broader than that of the apostles. Paul's words give the impression that he is recognizing these "ministers of the Word" as a distinct group among the elders.

Leaders = Elders

It is worth reflecting on the meaning of the term "leader." It occurs in Heb 13:7, 17 and 24 as a participle in the plural form (cf. the King James Version: "them that have

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Scholars differ in their explanations of the distinctions between priests who were Levites and other Levites who did not serve as priests.

[80] J. De Jong, "Two or Three? A Look at the Reformed View of Office," *Clarion,* 43, no. 12 (1994): 280-283 and no. 13 (1994): 304-306, but see especially pp. 281 and 305.

the rule over you"). The author of the letter to the Hebrews could have used another expression, referring to the leaders as "elders,"[81] but that would have indicated position rather than function.

The word "leader" has a special significance in Hebrews 13. It refers to someone who "goes ahead of" the ones he is leading. There is a pastoral connotation here. The "leader" not only points out the way. He literally leads his followers along, giving them the thoughtful guidance they need. In the church, he is keeping watch over the souls of those entrusted to his care. That is important task for which he will be held accountable by God (Heb 13:17). The fact that the term "elder" is not used here shows us that in this context the task or function is more important than the actual title of "elder." However, that does not mean the title is without value. It is used often enough in the New Testament as a clear indicator that those in a position of leadership were to be honoured by following their example (cf. Heb 13:7).

Special Elders in Jerusalem

Van Bruggen notes that elders in Jerusalem are mentioned in three distinct passages in the book of Acts. The first instance is in 11:30, cf. 12:25. The second time is in 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23, and 16:4. The third time is in Acts 21:18, where reference is made to the decision of Acts 15. There, as in Acts 15, James seems to play a leading role, giving the impression that in both cases he spoke on behalf of the elders. These elders are to be distinguished from the apostles and also from "the Seven" mentioned in Acts 6. Their

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[81] See 1 Ti 5:17 for an example where a connection is made between elders and leadership (Οἱ καλῶς προεστῶτες πρεσβύτεροι) using a participial form of προΐστημι, a synonym for the term used in Heb 13:7, etc.

unique position is of significance not only for the church of Jerusalem, but also for churches elsewhere.[82]

G.P. van Itterzon points to a study by H. Mulder that notes differences between the elders in Jerusalem and those in congregations elsewhere. The elders in Jerusalem are simply referred to as "the elders," whereas elders in other places are called elders "of the church" (cf. Ac 14:23 and 20:17). No mention is made of a formal selection process either, although this did occur in connection with other office bearers in the book of Acts. They simply appear on the same level as the apostles, next to James, apparently forming a group together with him.[83] Together with the apostles, their authority extends over all the churches (cf. Ac 15:23).

Van Bruggen suggests that the position of the elders in Jerusalem is comparable to that of those in the Old Testament who were referred to as "elders" in the Greek translation of Jos 24:31 and Jdg 2:7. They could give a firsthand testimony of the work of the LORD, having entered the land of Canaan together with Joshua. Similarly, the elders in Jerusalem could add their testimony to that of the apostles concerning the work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Evidence of the presence of such a group of people can be found in Ac 1:21-22 and is also confirmed by Papias, who wrote at the beginning of the second century that he and others had been looking for reliable testimonies concerning what Jesus had said from "elders" who had known and heard him.[84] Van Bruggen points out that Papias refers to disciples of Jesus as elders (*presbuteroi*). Irenaeus, on the other hand uses the term in a broader sense to refer to elders dating back to the time of the apostles.

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[82] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 78-79, cf. 91.
[83] G.P. van Itterzon, *Het kerkelijk ambt in geding*, Theologie & Gemeente 10 (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J.H. Kok, 1974), 32-33. The references are to H. Mulder, *Jakobus en de oudsten in de boeken van Lucas*, Amsterdam 1972, in Exegetica, Nieuwe reeks, 1ste deel, 19-20, 23, 55-56, and 62-63.
[84] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 82-86.

He even includes Papias among those to whom he refers as *presbuteroi.* Nevertheless, it

is clear that he is using the term to refer to those who were there in the beginning and not

elders chosen later.[85]

Chosen and Appointed Elders

Aside from the elders who had a special position in the early stages of the New

Testament church, there were also others who were acknowledged as elders. In Ac 14:23,

special reference is made to them being chosen by being appointed or elected in every

church where Paul and Barnabas had worked. This indicates that it was normal for a

church to have elders (cf. Ac 20:17). Comparison with Tit 1:5 and 1 Pe 5:1 leads to the

same conclusion.[86]

The position of elders is not one simply devised by people on the basis of

expedience. The way in which the New Testament presents this office gives reason to

speak of it as a divine calling in which the Triune God is active. Elders today do well to

keep this in mind. It can help them to do their work with the conviction that they are

servants of Jesus Christ whom he equips with gifts of the Holy Spirit to fulfill their God-

ordained task.[87]

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[85] Van Bruggen, *Ambten,* 175, note 14.

[86] Van Bruggen, *Ambten,* 92-93. The occurrence of the terms "elder" and "overseer" as synonyms in the same context in Ac 20:17 and 28 as well as Tit 1:5-7 serves as an argument against the position R. Alastair Campbell has defended in his book, *The Elders,* 204. According to him, there were three stages in the growth of the church, from house churches led by overseers (ἐπίσκοποι), to churches where household leaders were working together as elders (πρεσβύτεροι), to the final stage where there were "town-churches" with elders under the leadership of a single overseer (ἐπίσκοπος). Interesting though his proposal may seem, it cannot be sustained in view of texts in which the terms are used interchangeably for the same men. While his view that the term "elders" was more an indication of honour than an office may hold true in some contexts, it is also not consistent with a text such as Ac 14:23, where we read that "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church." Such phraseology points in the direction of office.

[87] See Louis M. Tamminga, *Guiding God's People in a Changing World: A Handbook for Elders* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1998), 17-18, for some useful practical remarks about how having a sense of divine calling gives confidence in the fulfilment of the tasks of eldership.

Overseers

Since the terms for "elder" and "overseer" occur in the same context (cf. Ac 20:17, 28), they can be regarded as synonyms and as complementary terms that accentuate either the position or the tasks. Paul makes no explicit reference to "elders" in 1 Timothy 3, calling them "overseers" instead. This is also the case in Php 1:1, while in 1 Ti 5:17 there is no specific reference to "overseers" since they are the same as the "elders."[88]

The expression translated in 1 Ti 3:1 as "being an overseer" (*episkopé*) actually refers not to a position as such but to the activity of exercising oversight or supervision. An overseer (*episkopos*) has a dual function. The idea of being on guard is expressed in various passages (Ac 20:31, cf. Mk 13:33-37). As a guardian, he is to guard the doctrines handed down by the apostles. He is also to watch over the flock as a whole and over the members of the flock individually, functioning as an overseer or supervisor.[89]

As can be seen in 1 Pe 5:1-4, the work of an overseer is pastoral work (cf. also Jn 21:15-17; Ac 20:28-29). Van Bruggen notes, however, that although reference is made to "pastors and teachers" in Eph 4:11, the word "pastor" did not function separately elsewhere as the usual term for the elders in spite of the nature of their work. This makes sense given the fact that elders are in service of Christ, the Shepherd. Calling them "overseers" highlights their subordination to him and characterizes their task with regard to the congregation. An "overseer" is God's "steward" (*oikonomos*), in charge of a house that is not his own (Tit 1:7).[90]

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[88] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 96.
[89] Cf. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. ἐπίσκοπος, for the notions of "guardian" as well as "overseer or supervisor."
[90] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 97-98.

In his address to the elders of Ephesus, Paul instructed them: "Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Ac 20:28). In the Greek, he actually does not use a noun but a verb to describe their task: "to shepherd (*poimainein*) the church of God." The way he puts this highlights the fact that elders are not to be autocratic. The congregation does not belong to them but to God. It is also precious in his sight, purchased with the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son.

The qualifications listed in 1 Ti 3:1-7 for the overseer (called an elder in Tit 1:5 and an overseer in Tit 1:7) show that such a person fulfills an important task in the life of the church. His position is not merely administrative. It is clearly one of spiritual leadership. This is evident from the word "overseer" as well as the various qualities that are prerequisites for doing the work in a responsible fashion.

Instruction as to what overseers were supposed to do was necessary given the fact that the elders in Ephesus were falling short in their ministry (1 Ti 1:3-4; 6:3-5; 6:20-21).[91] The qualifications listed for the office in 1 Ti 3:1-7 shed light on the nature of the task of these elders. A central element is the ability to preserve and defend sound doctrine.[92] Overseers are to teach and admonish congregation members. This distinguishes their task from that of the deacons, who are called to "serve" in a different way (1 Ti 3:2; Tit 1:9; cf. 1 Ti 3:10, 13).[93]

1 Timothy 5:17

A comment should yet be made concerning 1 Ti 5:17, since this verse has given rise to various opinions as to whether two different kinds of elders are meant, or that there is only one kind of elder, but some are busier than others with the task of preaching

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[91] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 98.

[92] Versteeg, "Het karakter van het ambt volgens Efeziërs 4:7-16," 67.

[93] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 100.

and teaching. Versteeg reads 1 Ti 5:17 in the light of 1 Ti 3:2 and Tit 1:9, interpreting the text in reference to elders. According to him, all elders are responsible for preaching and teaching. However, those who put in extra efforts in this regard (*kopiōntes*), especially those who are occupied on a fulltime basis, deserve financial support ("double honour"). They are not a separate group next to the elders, but occupy a position in the midst of the elders.[94]

The word "honour" in 1 Ti 5:17 can refer to the respect that is due to an office bearer. The context, however, makes it clear that "double honour" is indeed a reference to financial support in connection with hard work, especially that of preaching and teaching.[95] Although all elders could in principle be burdened with such work, it seems that practical considerations led to a division of responsibilities. The result was that those for whom preaching and teaching in particular became full-time activities would also be honoured for this work through financial remuneration. It is not hard to see how such a group within the body of elders would gradually develop into a somewhat separate group.

The Form for the Ordination (or Installation) of Ministers of the Word used in the Canadian Reformed Churches distinguishes in the light of 1 Ti 5:17 between "elders who ruled the congregation" and those who "were also called to labour in preaching and teaching," indicating that they "are now called ministers of the Word." The word "now" indicates a certain historical development.[96] Signs of this development can already be found within the New Testament.

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[94] Versteeg, "Het karakter van het ambt volgens Efeziërs 4:7-16," 70-71. George W. Knight speaks in this connection of "a special class of 'elders,' church officers," in *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 231.

[95] Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon* defines the term τιμή as "honor conferred through compensation, *honorarium, compensation.*"

[96] Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches, *Book of Praise*, 619. It is interesting to note van Bruggen's cautiously worded formulation that "from the New

The Form for the Ordination (or Installation) of Ministers of the Word also makes a point of describing the task of such ministers as that of "the ministry of reconciliation," making reference in this connection to 2 Co 5:18-20.[97] This passage is a reminder of the link between the work of the priests and Levites in Old Testament times with the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The unique sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross has had a major impact on how one must view the Old Testament ministry of reconciliation, but also on how this relates to the ministry of reconciliation now. In the church of Jesus Christ it a natural development after the apostles and prophets to see people whose special work involves focusing attention on his unique sacrifice and what it means for believers. Christ continues to work in a special way through the ministers of the Word, bringing people into a reconciled relationship with God.

Romans 12:8

In Ro 12:6-8, the apostle Paul lists various gifts that church members have, including in this list separate references to someone who teaches (Ro 12:7) and someone who leads or rules (Ro 12:8). This gives further substance to the assumption that it is legitimate to distinguish between "teaching" and "ruling" elders, even though other passages clearly relate both activities to eldership.[98]

At the time of the Reformation Ro 12:8 figured prominently together with 1 Co 12:28 in discussions regarding the work of elders, leading to the conclusion that governing is a distinct area of work in the life of the church that requires people who are

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Testament it does not appear that it would be forbidden to set apart some who have a special gift for teaching in order that they may preach the gospel." See van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 166.

[97] Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise of the Canadian Reformed Churches, *Book of Praise*, 619-620.

[98] Participial forms of προΐστημι, ("rule" or "direct") are also used in 1 Ti 3:4f., 5:17 and 1 Th 5:12 in regard to elders.

dedicated to this task. In this regard, 1 Ti 5:17 only has a secondary function, serving to confirm the insight that it is not "something strange" to have "elders" at work next to preachers. In addition to this, at the time of the Reformation, references were also made to Ac 14:23, Ac 15 and 20, 1 Th 5:12, as well as the passages in Tit 1, 1 Ti 3 and Php 1:1. Attention was also focused on the role of elders representing the church in a situation of discipline (Mt 18:17).[99]

1 Corinthians 12:28

1 Co 12:28 makes it clear that in the church God has appointed people who have a variety of gifts. A distinction between teaching and ruling can easily be inferred from it. Next to referring to "apostles" and "prophets" Paul mentions "teachers" as a group that is distinct from those who have "gifts of administration."

H.W. Beyer interprets the term translated in 1 Co 12:28 as "administration" as referring to "the specific gifts which qualify a Christian to be a helmsman to his congregation, i.e., a true director of its order and therewith its life." He suggests that this office "may well have developed especially in emergencies both within and without," and sees this as distinct from that of the apostles, prophets and teachers who were responsible for the proclamation of the Word. He goes on to state that Paul's reference to those able to help others and those with gifts of administration can be linked to the overseers and deacons mentioned in Php 1:1 or those in Ro 12:8 who are said to have the gift of leadership.[100] The connection with the work of "ruling elders" is not hard to see.

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[99] M. Te Velde, "De afbakening van de ambten III," *De Reformatie*, December 4, 1993, cited from the internet: http://www.kerkrecht.nl/main.asp?pagetype=onderdeel&item=5&subitem=624&page, accessed June 12, 2008.

[100] H.W. Beyer, "κυβερνῆσις," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 1036.

Eldership: A Permanent Office

It is clear from the various passages dealt with that elders not only played a prominent role in Old Testament times. They also had a special, ongoing responsibility as leaders in the New Testament church. Graafland points out that because of the theocratic situation in Israel, the work of elders in Old Testament times and in later Judaism was administrative, involving governing. It had a social as well as "ecclesiastical" character. In the New Testament the task of elders is ecclesiastical.[101]

Van Bruggen sees only the office of elder as being permanent in the New Testament. "They in turn," he states, "shall appoint helpers for building up the community, so that all work in the congregation gets led and done in a Spiritual and orderly way." [102] This relegates the deacons to a secondary position. Php 1:1 as well as 1 Ti 3:8-12, however, give the clear impression that deacons are more than just an afterthought in church life and that there is a measure of equality between them although their tasks are different. They are to fulfill a vital task in ministering to the needs of a congregation. They may not always be present, especially in a small body of believers, but the ministry of mercy requires attention. This work certainly becomes necessary as a church grows.

It is interesting to note van Bruggen's cautiously worded position that "from the New Testament it does not appear that it would be forbidden to set apart some who have a special gift for teaching in order that they may preach the gospel." He compares

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[101] Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt*, 294-295.
[102] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 166.

evangelists to present-day missionaries as well as to the minister of the Word who serves in one place.[103]

Te Velde is critical of van Bruggen's conclusion that ultimately the only permanent office is that of elder. Considering the New Testament description of activities pertaining to leadership in the church, he sees so many varied tasks that he questions the possibility of speaking of only one sort of elder. "Does 'elder' not in this way become such a container-concept that it becomes inevitable to split it further into sub-offices?" He then responds to his own question by saying: "According to me that is where you have to end up if you want to do justice, for example, to the three passages mentioned from Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4." In his opinion, the summaries in such passages justify differentiating between a teaching and a ruling office "as two unique forms of one office." That is the approach taken by the Reformers centuries ago and he regrets that the revised Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons no longer refers to Ro 12:6-8 and 1 Co 12:28, texts which were once foundational for the Reformed doctrine of office.[104]

Te Velde illustrates the weakness of van Bruggen's approach by pointing to the evangelist, compared by van Bruggen to a missionary or minister of the Word. Te Velde asks: "Do we suddenly see a sort of preaching office after all as a separate office next to that of the (local) elders?" In his opinion, in the course of time the position of an elder whose special work is that of teaching leads to a different position than that of other

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[103] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 166.

[104] M. Te Velde, "De afbakening van de ambten vandaag," *De Reformatie*, 1 januari 1994, http://www.kerkrecht.nl/main.asp?pagetype=onderdeel&item=5&subitem=626&page, accessed June 13, 2008. See also "De afbakening van de ambten IV, *De Reformatie*, 24 december 1993, http://www.kerkrecht.nl/main.asp?pagetype=onderdeel&item=5&subitem=625&page, accessed June 13, 2008, where Te Velde also points to the now missing references to Ro 12:6-8 and 1 Co 12:28 in the Dutch Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons. The point he makes is also valid for the Form currently in use in the Canadian Reformed Churches.

elders. This approach to the situation indicated in 1 Ti 5:17 is in line with the passages from Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4. What such elders have in common makes it possible to regard the term "elder/overseer" as an over-arching concept. There is a differentiation where the two are not identical, but not entirely separate either.[105]

It is clear that the elders of the Old and New Testaments have much in common. However, the data surveyed so far gives reason to conclude that it is possible to distinguish the work of elders who are ministers of the Word from the work of elders who shepherd and govern the church. This distinction has a stronger basis than van Bruggen's reserved formulation suggests.

Those who now preach and teach share certain characteristics with the priests and Levites on the one hand, and with the New Testament apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers, on the other. That cannot be said in the same way of elders nowadays who are involved in the task of shepherding the flock with the Word of God, but chiefly as leaders who are responsible for overseeing the life and doctrine of individual sheep as well as being responsible for government of the church as a whole. Nevertheless, both types of elders can be found in the New Testament. It did not take long after the New Testament canon was rounded off for this distinction to become even more explicit.[106]

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[105] Te Velde, "De afbakening van de ambten vandaag," *De Reformatie*, 1 januari 1994.

[106] See, for example, the opening paragraph of the letter of Ignatius to the Philadelphians. Ignatius, who wrote this letter before his death at about 110 A.D., makes specific reference to three offices: the bishop, the presbyters and the deacons. Karl Bihlmeyer, *Die Apostolischen Väter – Neubearbeitung der Funkschen Ausgabe.* 3. Auflage. Erster Teil. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr <Paul Siebeck>, 1970), 102; cf. p. XXXI for the date of Ignatius' death.

No Female Elders

It should be noted that there are no female elders in the Canadian Reformed

Churches. Giving a lengthy defense of this policy would extend beyond the scope of this

dissertation. However, it is worth taking brief note of the underlying rationale.

Various passages in the Old Testament are important with regard to the position

of women in the church. The basic pattern outlining the relationship between a husband

and his wife is indicated in Ge 2:18, where the woman is described as "a helper suitable

for him." The underlying principle of headship is reiterated with varying emphases in

New Testament contexts such as 1 Co 11:3 and Eph 5:22-24. This headship is not a

matter of male superiority, for Ge 1:27 makes it clear that having been created "in the

image of God" includes both male and female. However, the creation order has

implications for marriage and for church life.

As history progressed, it became clear that the position of women among the

people of God was favourable compared to the way women were treated among other

nations. Various Old Testament laws protected women. Words of praise were devoted to

"a wife of noble character" (Pr 12:4; 31:10). Nevertheless, by the time of the ministry of

Jesus Christ, attitudes toward women were often negative.

Jesus treated women with respect. Many followed him and cared for his needs

(e.g. Mt 27:55; Mk 15:41; Lk 8:2-3), but it should be noted that he did not choose women

to be his special disciples (Mt 10:2-4; Lk 10:1; etc.). The apostles followed the example

of the Lord. No woman was chosen to replace Judas (Ac 1:21). Twelve male apostles

emerged as leaders of the church. On the day of Pentecost, all the followers of Jesus

Christ received the Holy Spirit, but when the apostles needed additional help, seven men were chosen (Ac 6:3).

It is worth noting that although the apostle Paul was originally a Pharisee (Php 3:5), he deliberately reached out to women in his ministry (e.g. Ac 16:13). Various women also helped him in his work and he writes about them with great respect. The New Testament portrays women as being quite active in church life. They were not only active in serving roles (Ac 9:36; 12:12; Ro 16:1-2), but even in teaching and prophesying (Ac 2:17; 18:26; 21:9; Ro 16:3; 1 Co 11:5; Php 4:2-3). However, there is no record of there being female elders.

The apostle Paul was specific in placing limits on the role of women in church life. He stipulates: "As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says" (1 Co 14:33b-34). This reference to "the Law" points to the Old Testament and clearly goes beyond being a temporary prohibition influenced by cultural circumstances.

Obviously the position that women should be "silent" and not "speak" does not mean women should be silent at all times. That would contradict such Bible passages as Pr 1:8 and 31:1. Paul did allow women to speak and even to teach (Php 4:2-3; Tit 2:3-4). Even in the context of worship services, his words in 1 Corinthians 14 cannot be interpreted as forbidding women to speak in any way. Women joined in songs of praise to God (Eph 5:19-20; Col 3:16-17).

Comparing Scripture with Scripture and keeping in mind the broader context of 1 Co 14:33b-35 leads to the conclusion that the focus is on women refraining from speaking in an authoritative way within the context of the public worship services,

thereby taking on a position of leadership within the life of the church. Paul makes it clear that he is not only addressing the disorderly situation that has arisen in Corinth, but that his words apply to "all the congregations of the saints" (1 Co 14:33b).[107] The point is that women should not usurp or undermine the authority given to the men who have the responsibility of leading the church.

Many scholars highlight 1 Co 14:35, and restrict the scope of Paul's prohibition by indicating that he is criticizing some women for causing disruption by their questions.[108] The point remains, however, that Paul has already made a more general statement in 1 Co 14:34 that "women should remain silent in the churches" (which can be taken as referring to worship services)[109] and went beyond addressing circumstances in Corinth by explaining that they "must be in submission, as the Law says." The reference to "the Law" can be taken to allude to the subordinate position of women, already evident in the creation order (Ge 2:18). Paul is clearly prohibiting any kind of speaking that could potentially undermine the leadership which should be exercised by the men in the

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[107] F.W. Grosheide, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 342-343, rejects the idea that Paul is only forbidding women to enter into discussions during the worship services. He insists that "Paul speaks in very general terms and does not think of the Corinthian conditions alone." He sees no conflict with 1 Co 11:5-6, since in his opinion in that chapter the apostle does not mention the praying or prophesying of women "as "taking place in the official services of the church."

Anthony C. Thiselton points out in *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text,* The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2000), 1156, that this is "not easy to sustain, since Paul at once goes on to discuss the Lord's Supper in 11:17–33, where the immensely solemn wording about self-examination (11:28) and drinking judgment on oneself (v. 29) precludes the notion that ch. 11 is like being 'at home' (ἐν οἴκῳ, v. 34)."

H. Wayne House allows for the interpretation that the prophesying took place in worship services, but argues that "in their prophesying nothing of church leadership or teaching men is included, since prophecy then was not expounding Scripture but was giving exhortation from God." See his article: "A Biblical View of Women in the Ministry - Part 2: Should a Woman Prophesy or Preach before Men?" in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (Dallas Theological Seminary, 1988) 145:154.

[108] Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1156.

[109] See, for example, 1 Co 11:18, where Paul writes about "coming together in church" / συνερχομένων ὑμῶν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ). Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 1160, notes the "semantic contrast" between "church" and "home" in 1 Co 14:34-35, making it clear that Paul is addressing what was happening in public worship in the church at Corinth.

congregation.[110] Even asking questions in the worship services is forbidden since it can become a vehicle for steering or dominating a discussion. This being the case, there is room to ask whether women were allowed to speak in tongues or prophesy at all during the worship services.[111]

The position taken by the apostle Paul in 1 Co 14:33b-35 is similar to what he writes in 1 Ti 2:11-14, where he explains why he does not "permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man." Again he refers to the book of the Law, this time specifically mentioning the order of creation explaining: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve." He saw the fall into sin as beginning with the woman not respecting her subordinate position with regard to her husband. She took the initiative and led him into sin. Accordingly, not having female elders is an application of a Scriptural principle derived from the order of creation.[112]

Gal 3:28 cannot be taken as an argument for having women in positions of official church leadership either, since this verse does not address that matter. It emphasizes equality in Christ.[113] This equality does not, however, imply that men and

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[110] The majority report of Deputies of the "Christian Reformed Churches" in the Netherlands argue along these lines in their report: Deputaten voor de vragen rond vrouw en ambt, *Vrouw en ambt: uitgave onder verantwoordelijkheid van de Generale Synode van de Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland 1998* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1999), 78.

[111] H. Ridderbos, *Paulus: Ontwerp van zijn theologie*, (Kampen: Uitversmaatschappij J.H. Kok N.V., 1966), 516, explains that 1 Corinthians 11 shows that women were free to pray and prophesy. He then compares 1 Co 14:28, where reference is made to keeping quiet in the church, with 1 Co 14:34, where the same verb is used, and concludes that women are to keep quiet when the church meets in an official way, but they are allowed to pray and prophesy outside the context of such public gatherings. Grosheide concludes in the light of 1 Cor 14 that "Paul in ch. 11 speaks of a praying and a prophesying (of women) in public rather than in the meetings of the congregation," *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 252.

[112] This point is emphasized by Jay E. Adams in *The Use of the Rod and the Staff: A Neglected Aspect of Shepherding* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2003), 44. It is important to derive the principle of subordination from creation, as expressed in Ge 2:18 and not from the situation which arose after man's fall into sin, described in Ge 3:16, which has often led to the subjugation of women. In *Women and the Word of God*, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co.), 238-241, Susan T. Foh stresses the importance of 1 Ti 2:12 in regard to why women should not be ordained to the office of a teaching or ruling elder. She notes that this is not supported by Scripture or the tradition of the early church.

[113] See also Adams, *The Use of the Rod and the Staff*, 44-45.

women should therefore also have the same functions in the church. Within the life of the church avenues are open for the use of a variety of gifts, also the gifts Jesus Christ has given to women in the church. Exclusion from church leadership does not imply inferiority.[114]

Deacons and Deaconesses?

Aside from 1 Ti 3:8-13 and Php 1:1, there are no direct references to deacons in the New Testament. Ac 6:1-7 can be interpreted as a reference to the work of deacons, but the term for the office is not used in that passage. The nature of their task, however, is diaconal. They were responsible for overseeing the daily distribution of food. They were chosen in order to enable the apostles to dedicate themselves exclusively to the ministry of the Word of God. The contrast in tasks highlights their respective responsibilities. This is quite in line with the rather functional title of deacon (*diakonos*) that surfaces in Php 1:1 and 1 Ti 3:8, 12. Elders and deacons are addressed together in Php 1:1. Evidently although their offices are different, they form a separate group, distinct from the rest of the congregation. This implies leadership.

Scholars have raised questions in regard to the women in 1 Ti 3:11. Are they the wives of the deacons, or do they form a third separate group next to the elders and the deacons?[115] The idea that a third group might be meant hinges on the absence of the possessive pronoun "their" in the Greek text of 1 Ti 3:11. It should be noted, however,

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[114] Susan T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God,* 246, correctly notes in regard to Gal 3:28 that "the unity of Christ's body includes diversity (I Cor. 12:4-6); it does not imply homogeneity nor the obliteration of distinctions."

[115] George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text,* The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan / Carlisle, England: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. / The Paternoster Press Ltd., 1992), 171, lists the possibilities as four options: "(1) The women are inherently part of the διάκονοι, (2) they are 'deaconesses' distinguished from but comparable with the διάκονοι, (3) they are female assistants to the διάκονοι, or (4) they are the wives of the διάκονοι." On the basis of a number of exegetical considerations, he regards it as most plausible that Paul is referring to wives of the deacons.

that a personal pronoun is also absent in the verses 4 and 12 ("his children") and is obviously implied there. Similarly, the pronoun "their" can be implied in verse 11. It can therefore be concluded that 1 Ti 3:8-12 is a reference to the wives of deacons.[116] They have to fulfill certain conditions because of the special position of their husbands in the church.

Even if 1 Ti 3:8-12 would describe a third group, this does not necessarily mean their position would be the same as that of the elders and deacons. Paul could be referring to the same women he described in 1 Ti 5:9-10 as "widows" (see also Ac 9:41). Such a group could have assisted the deacons. This does not mean that this group has a special office equivalent to that of the elders and deacons. The words "in the same way" imply a comparison with the deacons, but also distinguish the women from them.

A discussion concerning the position of women in the church would not be complete without considering the meaning of Ro 16:1, where Phoebe is described as "a servant" (*diakonos*) of the church in Cenchrea." The Greek word can be translated as "servant" or as "deacon(ess)." The basic meaning of the word does not, however, necessarily imply that Phoebe held the official office of deacon in the same way as implied by the reference to "elders and deacons" in Php 1:1, for example. It can point in the direction of another role functioning under their authority.

Van Bruggen argues for revising the position and task of deacons in Reformed church polity. According to him, deacons do not need to occupy a special ecclesiastical office in a church council together with elders. They are helpers whose task should be broader than only taking care of the poor. Women can also be involved in such work. He

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[116] A.J. Moggré, *Adam eerst... Studie over de positie van de vrouw in de gemeente* (Amsterdam: Buijten & Schipperheijn, 1988), 82.

acknowledges that it may be easier to do this in young mission churches than in traditional churches. In the latter case he agrees with a proposal brought forward in 1890 to have "a second kind of deacons" and advocates having deaconesses parallel to this. In this way much of the ministry of mercy done by societies can be brought back into ecclesiastical channels, under the oversight of elders.[117]

Having deacons in an official capacity next to elders, however, is a structure that is in harmony with Scripture (e.g. Php 1:1) and has strong historical roots in Reformed churches. It is also difficult to argue that their role does not involve any leadership. Nevertheless, it is clear from Scripture that there was more official involvement of women in diaconal work than is currently the case (see, for example, Ac 9:36, 41; Ro 16:1-2; 1 Ti 5:9-10). How to accomplish this within parameters indicated by Scripture continues to be a topic worthy of discussion. It would be interesting to devote more attention to this, also from the perspective of the history of discussions about this in Reformed churches, but this is not possible within the confines of this dissertation.[118]

Orderly Service

The New Testament presents a varied picture of a multitude of gifts in the life of the congregations. Some of those gifts point in the direction of ecclesiastical office. Others do not. One central statement, however, can be taken to apply to all of the churches. That is that "everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Co

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[117] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 117-118, cf. also 183, footnote 24.

[118] P. Biesterveld discusses the work of "deaconesses" from a historical perspective in P. Biesterveld, J. van Lonkhuijzen and R.J.W. Rudolph, *Het Diaconaat: Handboek ten dienste der Diaconieën* (Hilversum: J.H. Witzel, 1907), 262-270. See also the section on "Het diaconaat en de hulp der Vrouw" by J. Hoek in A.J.L. van Beeck Calkoen et al., *Diaconaal Handboek ten dienste der Gereformeerde Diaconieën* (Rotterdam: J.H. Donner, 1929), 102-107, and the chapter on "Women and the Ministry of Mercy" in Peter Y. De Jong, *The Ministry of Mercy for Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1961), 233-253. Van Bruggen notes that Reformed Ecumenical Synods discussed the question of "deaconesses" for years. See: *Ambten*, 111, and pp. 180-182, notes 16-17.

14:40). Paul has already given a reason for this rooted in God's character. "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace" (1 Co 14:33).

The need for things to be done "in a fitting and orderly way" is of central significance in regard to the offices that are recognized and implemented in the church. Some form of organization is needed to channel and give focus to the many varied gifts. The norm for this can be found in the apostolic teachings, teachings which build on the foundation of the Word of God found in the Old Testament. In this way, the Old and New Testament give us the standard for discerning and evaluating the gifts that Christ gives to his church, as well as the goal to which they must be applied.

C. Trimp indicates that "the heart of ecclesiastical office is the God-given mandate to fulfill a certain task." He describes the following as necessary elements:

1. It involves regular activity.

2. It is characterized by service.

3. It is for building up the church using the means of grace that God provides.

4. It "requires an institutional framework" (i.e. a Church Order) to ensure that the task can be fulfilled in an orderly and regular way.

This leads him to the following definition. Ecclesiastical office is "a mandate given by God to render continuous, regulated service to the congregation with a view to building her up internally and externally." He rejects replacing the word "office" by "ministry," indicating that the mandate and the continuous character of the service determine the additional value of the concept of "office."[119]

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[119] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 5-6. Trimp's effort to connect office and divine mandate is deliberate. By doing this, he opposes Karl Barth's emphasis on "ministry," which he sees moving along the lines of congregationalism. Trimp also emphasizes the concept of mandate in opposition to Methodist resistance to ecclesiastical office. He warns that excluding the concept of mandate and emphasizing ministry as a

Du Rand cites five components that U. Brockhaus has discerned in the New Testament in regard to ecclesiastical office.

1. An office must be permanent.

2. It must be acknowledged and accepted by the church or Christian community.

3. The office and office bearers must be treated with the necessary respect on the basis of their authority and dignity. The office bearer occupying the position has a special relationship to the community or church.

4. The appointment to a task takes place through ordination and the laying on of hands.

5. There is always a juridical element connected to the office.[120]

Eldership for a Term or a Lifetime?

One can agree with Brockhaus that ecclesiastical office should indeed have the characteristic of permanence. "Official" service is not something incidental. There is an element of continuity associated with a particular person that is also necessary for orchestrating activity within the church.[121] In this connection it is good to note, as Trimp does, that this ministry also requires an institutional framework that offers a guarantee for orderly and regular progress in the fulfillment of the task. He correctly points out that

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function of the church can make it irrelevant who does the work. He writes that it is also conceivable that the term "ministry" or "service" can be misused in a horizontalistic way, as if humanitarian efforts already fulfill the deepest intention of the structure of the church. Further, Trimp notes a shift from office to "ministry" in what Roman Catholic theologians have written in regard to pronouncements made by the Second Vatican Council. As can be seen in his definition of office, he is not opposed to the concept of ministry or service as such, but he objects to regarding this as the preferred concept because of problems with its interpretation. See his explanation on pages 115-119. For further discussion of the relationship between the concepts of office and ministry, see also his book *Inleiding in de ambtelijke vakken*, (Kampen: Copieerinriching v.d. Berg, 1978), 55-56 and his article "Ambt en Diakoniologie" in *Gereformeerde ampsbediening*, ed. P.J. Rossouw (Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel, 1988), 181.

[120] du Rand, "Charisma en amp," 79.

[121] Versteeg, "Het karakter van het ambt volgens Efeziërs 4:7-16," 50.

"the Church Order provides for this structural framework."[122] This is a logical

consequence of the requirement mentioned by the apostle Paul for the life of the church,

that "everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Co 14:40).

Where the office of elder is held in honour, people have to address the question

whether elders who are appointed should serve for life or for a more limited period of

time.[123] In the course of history, many Reformed churches adopted a limited term for

elders and deacons to lighten the burden for those serving in these offices, to make the

best use of the spiritual gifts in the congregation, and to prevent the development of

hierarchy.[124] Van Dam gives a useful survey of arguments that have been brought

forward in defense either of lifetime eldership or of term eldership. He favours the idea of

a lifelong term of eldership, but also acknowledges the importance of considering what is

best for a congregation.[125]

A Divine Mandate for Service

Trimp's list of the components of ecclesiastical office is comparable with the one

offered by Brockhaus, but there are also some differences. What is missing in the list

offered by Brockhaus is an explicit reference to a divine mandate to fulfill a certain task.

Ecclesiastical office is not a human invention. It is rooted in a mandate given by God.

While emphasizing the concept of a mandate, it should never be forgotten that

ecclesiastical office has a "ministerial" or serving character. The authority of the office

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[122] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 6.

[123] Describing developments from 1848-1982, H. De Moor notes that this was a subject of considerable controversy in the Christian Reformed Church for quite a few decades, especially in the second half of the 19th Century. The debate was settled in favour of having elders and deacons serve for a limited term, with the exception of a Korean Presbyterian Church that joined the Christian Reformed Church in 1978. See his dissertation: "Equipping the Saints," 14-22.

[124] For a detailed summary of discussions in Reformed churches regarding eldership for life or for a limited term, see H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht*, third edition (Kampen: Uitgeverij de Groot Goudriaan, 1985), 1:601-608.

[125] Van Dam, "The Elder as Preserver and Nurturer of Life in the Covenant," 291-298.

should be balanced with a serving attitude, for that is essential for ministry as exemplified by Jesus Christ (Jn 13:1-17) and prescribed by him (Mt 20:25-28; 23:11-12; Lk 22:25-27).

It is not surprising that the word "ministry" (*diakonia*) became a characteristic term for the work to be done by the apostles (Ac 1:17; 6:4; also 20:24; 21:19; Ro 11:13; 15:25; 2 Ti 4:5). The apostle Paul, for example, refers to himself as Christ's "servant" (Ro 1:1) and as a "helper" (1 Co 4:1). The term "helper" refers to someone who functions in a subordinate capacity. The apostle Peter stresses that elders are to do their work under "the chief Shepherd" (1 Pe 5:1-4).

The task of office bearers continues to be a humble one. They function under the authority of Jesus Christ. He made it clear that "even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mk 10:45), Accordingly, he warns his followers not to lord it over others, instead commanding them that "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and however wants to be first must be slave of all" (Mk 10:43-44).

Official Acknowledgement

Efforts to exercise leadership in the church without an official appointment to a position are potentially dangerous. Leadership in a church must be given in an orderly way. Otherwise polarization and the forming of groups pursuing their own agenda takes place easily. Acknowledgment of certain gifts and official acceptance by the church community in a position of leadership is essential. Election by the congregation is therefore a significant element in the calling to the office (Ac 6:2-6). It is a sign of the maturity of the congregation after Pentecost, superseding the use of the lot, the last recorded use being before Pentecost in Ac 1:26. Ultimately, however, those already

serving as leaders in the church also play a key role in ensuring that leadership in the church is continued in a responsible way (2 Ti 2:2).

In Reformed churches, the respective responsibilities of the congregation and the office bearers are visible during the official process of choosing and acknowledging those who are to become new office bearers. Under the guidance of consistory (the elders) with the deacons, the congregation participates in the process of calling individuals to office. As stipulated in Article 3 of the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches, members are given the opportunity to "draw the attention of the consistory to brothers deemed fit for the respective offices." Following the process of nomination and election, "those elected shall be appointed by the consistory with the deacons in accordance with the adopted regulations." The involvement of the congregation does not cease at this point. "Prior to the ordination or installation the names of the appointed brothers shall be publicly announced to the congregation for its approbation on at least two consecutive Sundays."[126]

As we have seen, Brockhaus suggests that in connection with ecclesiastical office an appointment to a task must always be accompanied not only by ordination, but also by the laying on of hands in connection with every ordination. It is questionable whether this position rests on strong Scriptural grounds. References to the laying on of hands can be found in 1 Ti 4:13 (by a body of elders), 5:22 (by Timothy), and 2 Ti 1:6 (by Paul).

Versteeg remarks in regard to 1 Ti 4:14 and 2 Ti 1:6 that the laying on of hands by Paul was not a form of apostolic succession. Who did the laying on of hands is evidently not of primary importance. "Rather, the laying on of hands takes place on

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[126] *Book of Praise*, 656-657. In this approach, Reformed Churches have sought to find the balance between the authority of the office bearers as leaders responsible for the government of the church and the right of the congregation to have a voice in choosing her office bearers.

behalf of a church and is an expression of the acceptance by the church of a person's

divine call to office.[127] According to Venter, "the laying on of hands is on the one hand a

symbol of the gift of the Spirit and on the other a concrete way of expressing that the gift

of office is given through the Spirit."[128]

What is described in Scripture in regard to Timothy does not necessarily need to

become a prescription in connection with the ordination of every office bearer in the

church, but it can be taken as an indication to associate this ceremony with the ministry

of the Word. In Reformed churches the laying on of hands has been reserved for those

who are set apart for the ministry of the Word and sacraments; not for elders and

deacons. A factor in this could be that while elders and deacons only serve for a limited

period of time, ministers of the Word serve continuously until their retirement, at which

point they are released from service to a particular congregation.

Only One Overseer?

In 1 Ti 3:2, the apostle Paul makes a reference to "the overseer" in the singular

form. Like the general reference in 3:5, this is a "generic singular," similar to Tit 1:7,

where comparison with 1:5 makes it clear that more than one elder is involved in the

oversight of a congregation.[129] Versteeg also points this out and emphasizes that the New

Testament does not indicate that churches were under the authority of a single overseer.

He therefore cautions against reading a later development into the pastoral letters. The

use of the singular form for "overseer" (1 Ti 3:2) is the same as that in 1 Ti 2:11, where

the singular is used in reference to a group.[130]

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[127] Versteeg, "Het karakter van het ambt volgens Efeziërs 4:7-16," 68.
[128] Venter, "Amp en ampsdraer - Gesigspunte uit die Nuwe," 96.
[129] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 105.
[130] Versteeg, "Het karakter van het ambt volgens Efeziërs 4:7-16," 69-70.

Various passages in the New Testament point to a plurality of leadership in the church. In Ac 20:17 we read about Paul calling "the elders of the church to come to him." Php 1:1 makes reference to "the overseers and deacons" of the church of Philippi. In 1 Ti 4:14, the Greek word *presbuterion* is used to refer to the "body of elders." The same term occurs in Luke 22:66 and Ac 22:5, where it is translated as "council." The use of the term in 1 Ti 4:14 and later in the early church indicates a clearly defined group of elders who together formed a council, although in the course of time the term could also mean "office of elder."[131]

Elders are overseers of the church. As van Bruggen points out, some spend more time on this task than others, but the New Testament gives no indication of a hierarchical structure of authority. The apostle John writes negatively about the efforts of someone such as Diotrephes "to be first" (3 Jn 9).[132] Office bearers share the responsibility of leadership together even though one among them may have a leading position.[133]

A Juridical Aspect

Office bearers have authority which has been delegated by Jesus Christ to those in a position of leadership in the church.[134] They are instruments for proclaiming his authority and ensuring that it is understood and acknowledged. This can already be seen in the case of the apostles (Mt 28:18-20; 2 Co 10:8; 13:10). There is a "juridical element" associated with the fulfilment of their task (Mt 16:18-19; 18:18-20).

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[131] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 95, cf. 176, note 5.

[132] Van Bruggen, *Ambten*, 107.

[133] See also Renkema-Hoffman, *Naar een nieuwe kerkenraad*, 26-27.

[134] Renkema-Hoffman rightly notes that although the term "authority" is not directly linked to the office bearers, their authority can be concluded from a wide variety of expressions. See: *Naar een nieuwe kerkeraad*, 12-13.

Those who became leaders in the church after the apostles also have authority (cf. Ac 20:28; 1 Co 16:10-11, 16; 1 Ti 4:11-13; Tit 2:15; Heb 13:17). Like the apostles, they may therefore be said to represent Jesus Christ as "ambassadors" (2 Co 5:20). They are God's "fellow workers" (1 Co 3:9), "entrusted with the secret things of God" (1 Co 4:1; cf. 1 Pe 4:10). Preachers of the Word in particular are called to spread to "the fragrance of the knowledge of him" who is Christ (2 Co 2:14).

Elders share in the calling to "shepherd" the church of God (Ac 20:28; cf. 1 Pe 5:2). The expression "to shepherd" conveys the idea of protection, but also that of ruling or governing.[135] Elders have been placed over the congregation "in the Lord" and are called to admonish congregation members if necessary (1 Th 5:12). They have the God-given right and mandate to exercise church discipline, excommunicating unrepentant sinners from the fellowship of the church in the name of Jesus Christ (Mt 18:15-18). The source and standard for their authority does not lie in themselves. Submission to them should therefore not be separated from obedience to the Word that they bring in the name of Jesus Christ.

The authority of ecclesiastical office can be demonstrated in connection with the work of apostles as well as elders after them, but it is less obvious in connection with the work of deacons. Nevertheless, like the elders they are "to be men worthy of respect" (1 Ti 3:8) and are "first to be tested" (1 Ti 3:10) before being entrusted with their office. This indicates that they too serve in a leading position in the church and must be respected because of their office, even though their serving attitude may tempt some to look down on them.

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[135] Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. ποιμαίνειν. See Rev 2:27 for a clear example of this aspect of the word.

Qualifications

The qualifications for the position of overseers and deacons indicate that their position is not merely administrative. It is an official position of authority and responsibility in the life of the church. Believers are obliged to acknowledge and accept this. However, as can be seen in the rejection of the prophets in Old Testament times and especially in the rejection of Jesus Christ, this does not always happen. That is why it is essential for office bearers to realize that the authority and value of their office is determined by God, not by man. Nevertheless, they must show themselves to be capable of fulfilling the tasks entrusted to them.

Spiritual qualifications—including moral integrity—are essential, but as can be seen in the lists given by Scripture, elders must also posses certain social skills, be able to teach, give evidence of self-control, and be capable leaders on the home front (cf. 1 Ti 3:2-13; 5:22; Tit 1:6-9; Jas 3:1; 1 Jn 4:1). Otherwise it will be difficult for church members to acknowledge and accept them as office bearers. An emphasis on a title (i.e. "elder") without the qualifications needed to live up to the function indicated by that title deprives it of content.

Deacons must possess similar qualities ("likewise," in 1 Ti 3:8), although the ability to teach is not listed among the prerequisites for this position. What does receive extra emphasis is that before being entrusted with such a position they must display trustworthiness in regard to financial matters (1 Ti 3:8).

Like Timothy, office bearers are also called to "fight the good fight, holding on to faith and good conscience" (1 Ti 1:19). That call to dedication to God and integrity in one's personal life is essential for fulfilling the tasks of ministry. Venter therefore rightly

suggests that the identity crisis experienced by some office bearers can perhaps be traced to problems in the relationship with God rather than external factors such as secularization, marriage, and the degradation of office.[136]

An Essential Task

The context of the Greek word *haphé*, translated in Eph 4:16 in the NIV as "ligament," seems to refer to office bearers, distinguishing them from other congregation members in the body of Christ.[137] Literally the word means "joint," "connection." [138] It can also be understood as "junction," "point of contact" in the body.[139] Indeed, office bearers fulfill such an essential task in the midst of the church.

Versteeg emphasizes that the task of office bearers is the "equipping" (*katartismos*) of church members. He links this to 2 Ti 3:16-17, where Paul writes about how Scripture is useful in order that the people of God may be thoroughly "equipped" (*artios*) for every good work. The point in Eph 4:12 is that they need to be enabled to fulfill their purpose as members of the body of Christ. Generally this would imply instruction, but in the context of Ephesians 4, where reference is made to the body, Versteeg points out that the word *katartismos* can also be understood as "a medical term: 'putting a limb in splints' or 'putting back into joint.'" The meanings can be complementary, so that the purpose of the instruction given by office bearers can be

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[136] Venter, "Amp en ampsdraer - Gesigspunte uit die Nuwe," 105.

[137] See: Lincoln, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ephesians*, 263, who notes the "greater emphasis" on the ligaments in Eph 4:16 as compared to Col 2:19. His analysis of the words διὰ πάσης ἁφῆς τῆς ἐπιχορηγίας leads him to conclude that a "mediating function" is being described. He therefore regards it as "highly probable that what is being highlighted is the role of the ministers in the whole body ruled and nourished by Christ, and that just as in v 11 the giving of Christ was embodied in particular persons, so here in v 16 the growth from Christ is mediated by particular persons."

[138] Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. ἁφή.

[139] Liddell, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. ἁφή.

understood by means of the medical imagery, that the members are restored and enabled to function properly in serving God.[140]

A Definition of Office

Drawing together the various components for orderly service in the leadership of the church, I come to the following definition of ecclesiastical office. All of this can be applied to the office of elders.

Ecclesiastical office is a position of leadership in the church involving the fulfillment of a divine mandate.

1. It must be fulfilled with the authority of the Word, in the name of Jesus Christ, and under his authority.

2. It must be regulated by the church (i.e. through a Church Order).

3. It must be continuous, having a permanent character.

4. It must be done in cooperation with fellow office bearers.

5. It must be characterized by a serving attitude.

6. It must be fulfilled in a capable way.

7. It must be geared to building the church up, equipping the members for service, using the God-given means of grace.

The Reformation and Ecclesiastical Offices

While addressing what they saw as deviations from Scripture in the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformers struggled to come to a renewed understanding of the church, her structure, and her calling. What is the church? Are office bearers indeed instruments in the hands of Jesus Christ, or are they simply ecclesiastical functionaries

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[140] Versteeg, "Het karakter van het ambt volgens Efeziërs 4:7-16," 55.

whose authority has been determined by church hierarchy or by congregational input or by a combination of factors? Answers to this have an impact on how people view the proclamation of the gospel and church discipline, both of which in Reformed circles are regarded as "keys" of the kingdom of heaven.[141] It is useful to consider questions related to the position and task of elders within this broader context.

C. Trimp indicates that ultimately the struggle of the Reformation in regard to "the nature and form of ecclesiastical office" was about "obedience to the Christ of the Scriptures. He is, after all, the only Lord and universal Bishop of the church (cf. Article 31 of the Belgic Confession)."[142] In their efforts to come to what they saw as the proper use of "the power of the keys," i.e. the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the Reformers parted company with the Roman Catholic Church.[143] Among them are two who have had a lasting impact on the development of theological reflection in Reformed churches. Their names are Martin Bucer and John Calvin. We will now explore some of their thoughts in regard to the doctrine of office and make some observations as to how this has been processed in the Dutch Reformed tradition and continues to be relevant for today, in particular for the office of elder.

Bucer

Martin Bucer's life was in various ways a remarkable example of the international character and wide extent of the Reformation. He was born on November 14, 1491 in Schlettstadt (Sélestat), not very far from Strasbourg. He grew up in the

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[141] For a summary of what the Canadian Reformed Churches believe in this regard, see Q. & A. 83-85 of the Heidelberg Catechism in the *Book of Praise*, 509-510.

[142] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 213. Article 31 of the Belgic Confession can be found in the *Book of Praise*, 465.

[143] As indicated by H. von Campenhausen, in "Der Schlüsselgewalt der Kirche," in *EvTh* 4 (1939), 148, the Reformation "was basically nothing less than a struggle for the keys, for putting an end to its misuse and re-introducing its proper, evangelical use." This quote can be found in German in van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 23, footnote 72.

Roman Catholic Church, joining the order of the Dominicans in 1506.[144] The first school

that Bucer attended in his youth was influenced by the pietism of the Brethren of the

Common Life as well as by Faber Stapulensis. This school helped lay a basis for practical

piety and stimulated Bucer's interest in the study of the early church fathers and the

exegesis of Scripture.[145] Undoubtedly the impact of pietism also contributed to his later

concern for promoting the purity of the church through church discipline.

Various people had a significant impact on Bucer's development. It was through

the writings of Erasmus in particular that Bucer developed an interest in the early church

fathers, incorporating various insights from them in his ideas concerning ecclesiastical

office. He shared Erasmus's ideal of uniting wisdom, eloquence, and piety, and

emphasized that office bearers should set a good moral example as well as call the

congregation to live in such a way. In the course of time, he paid increasing attention to

the need for elders who would be able to use church discipline as an instrument to

cultivate piety in the lives of the church members.[146]

Next to Erasmus, Martin Luther had a significant impact on Bucer's development.

In April 1518, Bucer underwent a fundamental change of theological insight resulting

from his encounter with Luther at a disputation in Heidelberg. Luther's theology

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[144] Paul Gruenberg, "Butzer, Martin," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia*, vol. II (reprint, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1977), 322. For a very useful biography of Bucer's life, including extensive descriptions of the social, political and theological currents of his day, see Martin Greschat, *Martin Bucer: A Reformer and His Times*, trans. Stephen E. Buckwalter (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004).

[145] Willem van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices in the Thought of Martin Bucer*, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions, vol. 57, trans. John Vriend and Lyle D. Bierma (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), 7-10. See also Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 7-13. Marijn de Kroon identifies Christian "piety" (Latin: *"pietas"*) as a key concept in Bucer's theology. He is reluctant to translate the Latin term, preferring to explain it as expressing the unity of faith and the life of faith as characterized by love. See for this: Marijn de Kroon, *Martin Bucer und Johannes Calvin: Reformatorische Perspektiven - Einleitung und Texte*, translated from Dutch by Hartmut Rudolph (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 125-169, 233-235.

[146] W. van 't Spijker, "De ambten bij Martin Bucer," in *Gereformeerde Ampsbediening*, ed. P.J. Rossouw (Pretoria: NG Kerkboekhandel, 1988), 112-113. On the influence of Erasmus, see also Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 25-31.

continued to influence him from that time onward.[147] The changed insights resulting from contacts with Luther and other Reformers led to changes in church life that could be termed "innovations." However, together with other Reformers, Bucer made it clear that the ultimate goal was to restore the church to the form it had prior to eight centuries of deformation caused by papists.[148]

In 1520, Bucer left the Dominican monastery where he was staying and became an evangelical preacher. In 1523, he settled in Strasbourg, furthering the cause of the Reformation there together with Matthias Zell, Wolfgang Capito, and Caspar Hedio. In the course of time, Bucer's influence extended beyond that city into other countries. In 1549, he moved to England and went to teach in Cambridge, where he died on February 28, 1551.[149]

The Focus on Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

Bucer recognized that Christ has a threefold office as prophet, priest, and king. Whereas Luther accentuated the priestly work of Christ culminating in the cross, Bucer viewed the kingship of Christ as being predominant, embracing the offices of prophet and priest. Working from the Old Testament onward, Bucer highlighted the progress of the history of redemption, emphasizing that the priestly work of Christ was the path toward his work of governing as King. His humiliation has been followed by his exaltation. His work of reconciliation extends through the centuries and he is directing all things toward their consummation.[150] "The prophetic office is implied in that of the priest while his

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[147] R. Stupperich, "Martin Bucer," in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft. 3.Auflage. A-C* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1986), 1454 and 1456. Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 26-31, 255-256.

[148] Peter Matheson, "Martin Bucer and the Old Church," in *Martin Bucer: Reforming church and community*, ed. D.F. Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 5.

[149] Gruenberg, "Butzer, Martin," 322-323.

[150] Van 't Spijker, "De ambten bij Martin Bucer," 114-115.

priestly work attains its goal in the kingship of Christ." As king he now applies the benefits of his sacrifice by the power of his Word and Spirit.[151] This emphasis on the kingship of Christ gives food for thought in regard to the role of elders. They are called to govern the congregation under Christ with a view to expressing and promoting the acknowledgment of his kingship.

Proceeding from the concept of the kingship of Jesus Christ, Bucer developed a view of the purpose of the church that was very wide in its scope. As summarized by van 't Spijker, it is "to activate and animate the powers of the kingdom and the body of Christ for the realization of Christ's rule over the whole of society in all its structures."[152] This is a concept that Bucer developed in detail during the final years of his life in England, where he wrote a work called *De Regno Christi* ("On the Kingdom of Christ") for King Edward.[153]

The development of a pneumatological emphasis which can be seen in Bucer is a characteristic of the Reformation.[154] The doctrine of the Holy Spirit is a key element in his theology. The Spirit grants fellowship with Christ and enables believers to continue in

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[151] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 41. In connection with the threefold office of Christ it is worth noting that Bucer rejected the idea that office bearers should be seen either as prophet, priest, or king. He preferred to see them as servants, called and sent out by Christ, the ascended King. See p. 116.

[152] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 366.

[153] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 349. On page 350, van 't Spijker explains that *De Regno Christi* is divided into two parts. "The first offers an analysis of the concept of the kingdom of God and establishes links with the church, its ministries and various functions. It is fundamental to the whole of Bucer's conception. In the second part, he suggests the rules and designs the laws which must serve the realization of the kingdom of God in England." In his list of "English Translations of Bucer's Works: in chronological order," in *Common Places of Martin Bucer*, (Appleford: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1972), 471, D.F. Wright notes that *De Regno Christi* has been translated into English as *The Kingdom of Christ*, by W. Pauck with P. Larken in *LCC* 19 (*Melanchthon and Bucer*, London, 1970, ed. Pauck), 153-394, noting, however, that Book 2.22-46 (*OL* 15, pp. 165-234), "the main part of the section on marriage and divorce," has been omitted.

[154] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 48.

this fellowship.[155] He enlightens the minds of believers to accept and understand the Bible as the Word of God. However, he is not only active in bringing people to faith; he also furthers their spiritual development and motivates them to serve God.[156]

There is a close connection between Christ, the Spirit, and the Word in Bucer's view of the church. United by the Spirit and guided by the Word, believers function as a communion of saints under Christ, the Head of the church. The priesthood of all believers functions within that communion. That priesthood "is grounded in Christology, stimulated by impulses from within Pneumatology, and realized in Ecclesiology."[157] Through the Spirit, Christ gives life and strength to the members of his body, who form a corporate unity and are bound to serve each other instead of living for themselves. Seeing Christ as the source of life and strength of the church also formed the basis for Bucer's emphasis on Christ rather than the pope as the head of the church.[158]

The Church and her Ministry

Bucer stressed the importance of having the right perspective on the church before one can develop a proper view of her offices and ministries. That was a key reason why, in 1538, he wrote what became a seminal work with the title: *On True Pastoral*

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[155] Van 't Spijker, "De ambten bij Martin Bucer," 119. Van 't Spijker notes the affinity between Bucer and Calvin on this point, but also that in this they differed from Lutheran Protestantism. In 1529 in Marburg, Luther even declared to Bucer: "You have another spirit than we do." See "De invloed van Bucer op Calvijn blijkens de Institutie" in *Geest, Woord en Kerk: Opstellen over de geschiedenis van het gereformeerd protestantisme,* (Uitgeversmaatschappij J.H. Kok, Kampen: 1991), 102. The entire chapter (pp. 94-113) was originally published as an article in *Theologia Reformata,* XXVII, no. 1, March 1985, 15-34.

[156] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices,* 50, 56-58.

[157] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices,* 61. On page 80, van 't Spijker elaborates on this as follows: "Bucer's views on the priesthood of believers are not conceivable apart from their ever-present ecclesiological thrust. Inherent in his views is their church-formative power. The priesthood of believers only functions in the one great body of Christ. It is not an accident that Bucer, much more than Luther, proceeded to give prominence to the community."

[158] Peter Stephens, "The church in Bucer's commentaries on the Epistle to the Ephesians," in *Martin Bucer: Reforming church and community,* ed. D.F. Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 47-51, 58.

and the Proper Pastoral Ministry, How the Same Should be Ordered and Exercised.[159] In

this publication, Bucer strongly emphasized the church as the communion of saints,

involving union with Christ, but also union with one another. This is a spiritual unity that

does not consist of merely having "the same ceremonies, but in having the same doctrine,

faith and proper use of the sacraments."[160]

Bucer spoke of the universal church of believers "who are born again by a true

faith," "united in Christ whether in heaven or on earth." This is not meant in an

exclusively mystical sense, for the universal church manifests itself in the local churches

and is recognizable primarily by the preaching of the Word, but also by the sacraments

and discipline. The true church can be known by its adherence to the Word of God, even

though within the church on earth there is a mixture of believers and unbelievers.[161]

Bucer did not wish the concept of church to become so spiritualized that it cannot

be localized. For this reason he described the church from more than one perspective,

highlighting the visibility of the church as "the gathering and congregation of those who

have been gathered and united in Christ our Lord through his Spirit and Word from the

world in such a way that they form one body and members of one another, each having

his own office and task for promoting the common good of the entire body and of all

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[159] *Von der waren Seelsorge und dem rechten Hirtendienst, wie derselbige in der Kirchen Christi bestellet und verrichtet werden solle,"* in *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften: Band 7. Schriften der Jahre 1538-1539,* ed. Robert Stupperich (Gütersloh and Paris: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn and Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), 90-241. Robert Stupperich has written a helpful introduction to this work on pastoral care on pages 69-89. In his introduction Stupperich mentions why Bucer wrote this work. As Bucer put it in writings to Ambrosius Blarer and the Bohemian brother Jan Augusta, it was because of the increasing lack of knowledge of the essentials of what Scripture teaches concerning the church and her life, in particular the need for church discipline. See pages 69-70 and 72. See also van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices,* 352.

[160] Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge,* 95.

[161] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices,* 63-64, 356-357. See also Robert Stupperich's introduction to Martin Bucer's *Von der waren Seelsorge,* 72.

members."[162] This forms the context within which those who have special offices in the church do their work.

In the course of time, Bucer placed increasing emphasis on the visible side of the church, emphasizing the ministry through which Christ channels grace. The role of ministers "is not only declaratory but efficacious," becoming "a component in the application of salvation."[163] According to van 't Spijker, "Although it is always dangerous to subsume the whole of a person's theology and work under a single heading, one can without any risk characterize Bucer as a theologian of the ministry of the church."[164]

After the publication of his work *On True Pastoral Care,* Bucer developed his ideas on ecclesiastical offices and church discipline further. In the following year, 1539, he published two more works in regard to church discipline and ecclesiastical practices: *Ordenung der Christlichen Kirchenzucht* and *Ordenung der Kirchenübunge.*[165] As time went by there was no essential change in his thinking on these matters. As expressed in his Testament in 1548, his desire was to remain true to the doctrine and ministry of the church outlined in his publication on true pastoral care a decade earlier.[166]

In regard to the development of Bucer's view of the ministry of the church, van 't Spijker speaks of two lines that emerge without opposing each other: the priesthood of all believers on the one hand, and the ministry of the Word by virtue of "the mission of God" *(missio Dei)* on the other. He remarks that Bucer repeatedly brought this forward in

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[162] Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge,* 98-99.
[163] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices,* 465.
[164] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices,* 2. Cf. also Marijn de Kroon, who stresses that for Bucer, "church" and the various tasks of the church essentially amounted to "ministry": "ministry of the Word, ministry of the sacraments, and ministry of church discipline," in *Martin Bucer und Johannes Calvin,* 255.
[165] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices,* 118.
[166] Stupperich points this out by means of a quote from Bucer while introducing Bucer's work: *Von der waren Seelsorge,* 69-70.

confrontations with Anabaptists and Spiritualists. The unity of these two lines lies in their coming from the Spirit, the source of the diverse gifts. Van 't Spijker concludes: "The core of Bucer's doctrine of office is located in pneumatology."[167] But this is not to say that this is Bucer's only focal point. Bucer's view of office expresses his Christology, pneumatology, and ecclesiology. As Head, Christ rules his church through the offices by the Holy Spirit, whom he sent from the Father.[168] It is not hard to see how vitally important it is to keep this conception of office alive today in regard to how elders and congregation members view the office of elder.

According to Bucer, Christ is both "minister" of the church and the source of her ministry. He instituted the ministry and works through his ministers, giving them their gifts and tasks. This obligates them to work humbly and faithfully under the authority of the Word of God, which is their only source of authority. The gifts and tasks entrusted to them are distinct from the many other gifts that Christ gives to members of the church. This motivates congregations to respond to the ministers, making use of their ministry.[169]

Bucer was convinced that a proper view of office bearers as instruments of Jesus Christ provides a safeguard against either overestimating or underestimating the value of the office.[170] He warned against the Roman Catholic overestimation of the ministry, where salvation was linked to the outward ministry rather than to God. But he also opposed the Anabaptist rejection of the ministry, insisting that it should be held in high regard as the ministry of Christ.[171]

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[167] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 109.

[168] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 463.

[169] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 366-367, 374-375, 381-383.

[170] Van 't Spijker, "De ambten bij Martin Bucer," 126.

[171] Stephens, "The church," 57. See also A. van Ginkel, *De Ouderling: Oorsprong en ontwikkeling van het ambt van ouderling en de functie daarvan in de Gereformeerde Kerk der Nederlanden in de 16e en 17e eeuw* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1975), 108-109. Van Ginkel aptly observes that seeing the

Ecclesiastical office should be respected, but not "absolutized," since office

bearers do not have intrinsic power. One must look beyond them to Christ. On the other

hand, ecclesiastical office should not be regarded as superfluous, since office bearers are

instruments in Christ's hands.[172] According to Bucer, "All errors concerning the offices

of the church, contempt for it or the abuse of it, …arise solely from the fact that people

do not really believe and understand that God himself deals with them and affects their

eternal salvation through these ministries of his."[173]

For Bucer there was no tension between gifts and office. He did not regard offices

as a later development in the history of the early church. He developed a unified view

from passages in 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4 and the Pastoral Letters.

Various members have different gifts and accordingly different tasks within the church,

distinguishing them from each other, but not elevating one above the others as being

better. Together, all are members of one body. The members depend on each other and all

are called to be subservient to the authority of the Word, under Christ, the Head of the

church.[174] Office bearers are not separate from the congregation, but exist in her midst, in

a spiritual partnership brought about through the Holy Spirit.[175]

Maintaining Bucer's view of office bearers and other church members as both

being under the authority of the Word and under Christ can help elders refrain from

lording it over those entrusted to their pastoral care (1 Pe 5:3). At the same time it can

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office bearer as someone equipped by the Holy Spirit and used by Christ for ministry enabled Bucer to avoid the pitfalls of the Roman Catholic concept of office and that of the Anabaptists. In the Roman Catholic conception, God's grace is tied so strongly to human activity of the office bearers that its "grace character" is undermined, while the Anabaptist rejection of human intermediacy fails to acknowledge the vital role of ecclesiastical office in God's work of grace.

[172] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 377, cf. 382.

[173] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 378.

[174] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 469-470.

[175] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 374.

foster the awareness among the members of their calling humbly to submit to biblical instruction and admonition.

Because Bucer viewed sanctification as an ongoing lifelong process for Christians, he stressed the need for ongoing instruction and discipline in the church. According to him, that is how Christ exercises his dominion, leading and impelling believers increasingly to turn away from themselves and to surrender themselves completely to Christ, the Lord, who is their Head. As Shepherd, Christ uses his servants as instruments in the church to govern, lead and care for the sheep through the ministry of the Word. He sends them, giving them his Spirit and the authority to forgive or not to forgive sins (Jn 20:21-23), opening or closing the kingdom of heaven (Mt 16:19). Christ makes people Christians and saves them through the work of office bearers of the church in the ministry of the Word and the sacraments and in church discipline.[176]

Presbyteral Structure

Bucer pointed out that Christ used a variety of servants to ensure that the church would be well provided for spiritually and materially. He mentioned as temporary gifts prophets, people who speak in tongues, and miracle workers, as well as the apostles. Although he did not rule out the possibility of such gifts arising in the church today, he specified that there are basically two sorts of ministry: on the one hand the ministry of the Word and of discipline, which he called the ministry of pastoral care, and on the other, the ministry of taking care of the temporal needs of the poor. Bucer attributed the presence of sub-deacons and archdeacons as well as that of a bishop as the higher overseer together with elders working with him as fellow overseers to the increasing number and growth of the churches. The office and ministry of pastoral care, however, is

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[176] Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge,* 103, 107-111.

most important, since if it is undertaken properly, the ministry of taking care of people's material needs will not be lacking.[177]

Because of the variety of pastoral tasks, Bucer stressed the importance of having many servants in the church, the number depending on local needs. In his opinion, however, the office of elder and bishop are the same; they all have the same pastoral office. However, he did regard it as a natural and necessary development that among them one is the leader who devotes the most attention to the work. He cited as example, James, who was the prominent leader in Jerusalem (Ac 15).[178] Bucer used the term "bishop" for the one chosen to be leader among the elders, but the equality of this office and that of the elders is evident in that they were responsible for exercising oversight over him, advising him and where necessary admonishing him.[179] This view of the responsibility of the elders continues to be a characteristic of this office in the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Although Bucer spoke of the offices of pastors, overseers, elders and deacons (caring for the poor) as permanent offices, he was not overly concerned with sharp demarcations or with defining a specific number of offices. His main concern was to stress the unity of the offices, which in his opinion are basically presbyteral, embracing the aspects of pastoral care and diaconal ministry. He referred to primary presbyters or teaching elders (*episcopi:* bishops, overseers) who are trained in the languages of Scripture and capable of administering the Word and the sacraments. Next to them, on an equal footing, are ruling elders ("presbyters of the second rank"), whose main task involves the government of the church, including church discipline. They share

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[177] Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge,* 112-116.

[178] Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge,* 117-121; see also 131-134.

[179] Van Ginkel, *De Ouderling,* 105-106, 112-113l van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices,* 424-425.

responsibility for the use of the keys of the Kingdom together with the ministers of the Word. The Word which is proclaimed from the pulpit must also resonate in the homes of the congregation members through individualized pastoral care. Accordingly, the presbyters in the second group also have to be capable of teaching others and giving individualized spiritual care to church members. They must pay attention to the sheep, leading them to Christ and calling back those who stray. Those who sin because of weakness must be encouraged. But others who harden themselves must be admonished and excommunication must take place where this is necessary. Finally, Bucer described deacons as "a third kind of presbyter."[180]

Upon occasion Bucer even made a further distinction within the teaching office, describing the task of doctors as a fourth office. The main point was to ensure that there would be proper pastoral care in maintaining the bond between believers and Christ.[181] Nevertheless, Bucer also stressed the unity of the ecclesiastical offices, insisting that "the orders are orders of elders." For this reason, although he allowed for differences in the ordination ceremonies of bishops, presbyters, and deacons he wanted these ceremonies to be essentially the same, including the laying on of hands.[182]

Deacons

Van 't Spijker points out that initially, Bucer did not write much about the office of deacons since the poor in Strasbourg were already being very well taken care of by civil authorities. Later he gave more attention to the task of deacons.[183] He saw this office rooted in what is described in Acts 2, 4, and 6, where the offerings for the poor were

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[180] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 384, 389, 391, 420, 423, 428-431, 470; van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 105-106.

[181] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 108; van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 109-110, 118.

[182] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 420, cf. 413.

[183] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 432.

collected and distributed equitably to provide for the needy. He viewed the care of the poor as intrinsic to the rule of Christ over the church. This care is the primary task of the deacons. They are the ones who should establish who is poor and in need of help. Bucer's guiding principles were that members who were unwilling to work should not be helped (2 Th 3:10), but assistance should be given to those who needed it (1 Jn 3:17) and who do not have someone to assist them (1 Ti 5:8,16).[184]

Bucer viewed the work of deacons as work in the kingdom of Christ for furthering the kingdom. Something of the breadth of his vision can be seen in that he encouraged the deacons to meet immediate needs, but also to promote the economic well-being of church members not simply for their own sake, but for service to the Lord and for benefiting others. The work of deacons could include, for example, giving financial assistance for education or for the use of talents in the trades.[185]

The Call to Office

Bucer distinguished between a general and a special calling to ecclesiastical office. Every Christian has a general calling and consequently a duty to serve his neighbour. However, God also gives certain people a special calling. This special calling is indicated by the desire and the ability to build up the churches. It is important that the desire and ability be attested to by the congregation and outsiders since this singles them out as being fit for ministry in the church. Next to the desire and the ability as essential marks of a divine calling, Bucer also mentions a third factor: the opportunity *(locus)* for a person to fulfill this calling. Together, these three elements constitute the validation of a person's calling from God. Among these three, the calling of the church is secondary,

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[184] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 434-436.
[185] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 439-440, 472-473.

amounting to recognition of God's calling. This process shows how gift (*charisma*) and office are linked. [186]

Given the fact that charismatic individuals could sway the masses to accept them as leaders, Bucer came to see the importance of an orderly process in the appointment of someone to office. While valuing the involvement of the congregation, he also stressed the significance of proper procedure: "the calling to office, the examination of the candidates, and the installation or ordination of the officebearers."[187]

The Keys of the Kingdom

In the Roman Catholic view of the keys of the kingdom, the power of the keys was primarily located in the confessional. In contrast with this, Bucer emphasized that the power of the keys which Christ has given to the church as a whole is linked to the Word, which is to govern the life of the church. The Word is the source of power and the standard for the life of the church.[188] It is important to note that he did not restrict the keys of the kingdom to the proclamation of the Word, but included in this the process of admonition leading to excommunication as well as the government of the church.[189]

Since in Bucer's view Christ rules his people through his Word and Spirit, the ministry of the Word occupies a prominent place in the life of the church. Bucer stressed the connection between the preaching of the Word and the work of the Spirit. Preachers can proclaim the "doctrine of salvation," but it is the Holy Spirit who works "the knowledge of salvation."[190] The power of the keys is the power of the Holy Spirit through

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[186] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 393-397.
[187] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 392-393, 396.
[188] Van 't Spijker, "De ambten bij Martin Bucer," 111-112; van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 366.
[189] Van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 104.
[190] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 440.

the preaching of the Word. Forgiveness is proclaimed to believers and the damnation of those who do not believe is also announced.[191]

Initially, Bucer was afraid that people would wrongly put their trust in external ceremonies instead of in God. For that reason he highlighted the importance of faith for receiving the forgiveness of sins. Later, however, he emphasized that Christ channels redemption to sinners through the ministry of the Word and the sacraments. In this way he sought to deal with those who mistakenly trusted in ceremonies rather than placing their trust in Christ and also those who looked down on the ministry of the church when seeking salvation from Christ.[192]

Bucer saw Christ as the chief shepherd who uses the pastoral ministry for achieving a twofold goal: gathering the sheep who are not yet in his sheepfold as well as preserving and spiritually nurturing those sheep who are already in his church and fellowship, ensuring that they do not have defects in knowledge or in life.[193] He favoured the use of home visitation by overseers and elders as a way of devoting pastoral attention to individual members of the flock. He regarded this as especially important for the sick.[194] This can be viewed as an individualized form of the ministry of the Word in the midst of the congregation.

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[191] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 27-29. On page 28, van 't Spijker notes: "The power of the keys, therefore, is shifted from the confessional to the pulpit. It is declaratory in nature. In this period Bucer places all the emphasis on the idea that the preaching can only proclaim that which has essentially already occurred. Later he was to give greater emphasis to the significance of preaching as a means of grace."

[192] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 120.

[193] Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge,* 116-117, 141. He distinguishes between five types of pastoral care: seeking sheep who are lost, straying, wounded and broken, sick, and those who are healthy. It is remarkable how strongly Bucer emphasized that servants of Christ must reach out to people whom he describes as "lost sheep," elect according to God's eternal plan, but who do not confess Christ and who are outside the church. See pp. 141-146, and especially 153-154. He also stresses the need to seek straying sheep, those who have ended up outside the church but who still have a bond with Christ, 154-156. Reformed Churches usually associate such efforts with the work of ministers of the Word, but Bucer speaks about this more broadly as being the task of "the elders of the church" (mentioned specifically on p. 153).

[194] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 444-445.

Distinguishing between the visible and the invisible church did not lead Bucer to regard them as two separate entities. He emphasized that Scripture only speaks of one church composed of pious people. Van 't Spijker notes that by maintaining that the two concepts are essentially connected, Bucer "increasingly gained a theological basis for the exercise of church discipline which, after all, only functions in the zone where the visible and the invisible church meet."[195]

Next to the administration of the Word and sacraments, Bucer emphasized the importance of church discipline as the third mark of the church.[196] In his book *On True Pastoral Care,* he devotes extensive attention to the matter of church discipline. Many remarks continue to be relevant for the work of elders today. Noteworthy are the many pages on how sick and wounded sheep should be taken care of. When dealing with someone guilty of offensive sins, he stresses that a simple acknowledgement of wrongdoing and the promise not to repeat the sin is insufficient. There should be penance, involving clear evidence of repentance.[197] After explaining how pastoral care should be given to the various kinds of sheep, Bucer goes on to explain why "goats," unrepentant sinners, need to be excommunicated and how they are to be dealt with further.[198]

Bucer's emphasis on the need for church discipline was the result of a combination of factors. Oecolampadius, a Reformer in Basel, Switzerland, influenced his views. But Bucer also recognized that the Anabaptists had a point when they criticized

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[195] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices,* 65.

[196] Stupperich, "Martin Bucer," 1457. See also: van Ginkel, *De Ouderling,* 89.

[197] Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge,* 157-206. The principle of not only promising but also showing amendment of life is officially acknowledged by the Canadian Reformed Churches in the process of church discipline, but more thought could be given to Bucer's extensive explanation of its application.

[198] Bucer, *Von der waren Seelsorge,* 219-224.

the Reformed Church in Strasbourg for not applying discipline within the church. In

May, 1531, together with Oecolampadius and Ambrosius Blaurer, a German Reformer,

he developed a church order for the city of Ulm. It included a proposal for church

discipline because those who have committed a serious sin should not be admitted to the

Lord's Supper unless they have shown repentance.[199] As time went on, Bucer became so

convinced of importance of church discipline that he stressed that aspiring office bearers

should be examined not only as to their knowledge of doctrine, but also as to their

commitment to "Christ's discipline."[200]

Bucer stressed that the keys of the kingdom have been entrusted to the

congregation, not to certain individuals. In this way he took a position against the Roman

Catholic Church, with its emphasis on the position of the clergy, but also against

"individualizing spiritualists."[201] Proceeding from the presence of the Holy Spirit in the

church as an ecclesiological reality, he saw it as belonging to the priesthood of all

believers to exercise pastoral care with respect to each other. However, although the

congregation played a vital role in his conception of church discipline, he also maintained

that Christ governs his church through office bearers. They have a special task with a

view to the body of the church as a whole.[202] As office bearers, they are responsible for

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[199] Van Ginkel, *De Ouderling,* 82-83, 89-90, 92, 97, 103. In her book *Elders and the Plural Ministry: The role of exegetical history in illuminating John Calvin's theology* (Genève: Libr. Droz, 1988), 18, E.A. McKee notes that Oecolampadius can be seen as having influenced the development of the Reformed idea of lay involvement in church discipline, pointing to a study on this by Akira Demur, *Church Discipline according to Johannes Oecolampadius in the Setting of his Life and Thought* (1964). In regard to criticism by Anabaptists of the lack of discipline in the church, see also Greschat, *Martin Bucer,* 67-70, 118-121.

[200] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices,* 455.

[201] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices,* 85-86.

[202] Van 't Spijker, "De ambten bij Martin Bucer," 120, cf. 125.

exercising church discipline as a practical, personal form of pastoral care. This view had

a strong impact on Reformed churches in various countries.[203]

In Bucer's view, elders played a key role in the process not only in overseeing the

life of the congregation, but also in the oversight of the doctrine and life of the ministers

of the Word. He was also of the opinion that the elders should protect the ministers

against slander and share with them the burden of the pastoral care of the congregation.[204]

For Bucer, Christian discipleship involves voluntary submission to the discipline

of the church. He saw a vital connection between ecclesiastical discipline exercised by

office bearers and the mutual admonition of church members. The one cannot function

properly without the other. It is administered in the midst of the church to bring about

reconciliation with God, and where applicable, with the congregation.[205]

Bucer's insights on church discipline can continue to be valuable in serving to

help elders in the Canadian Reformed Churches maintain a biblical perspective on the

process of church discipline. Bucer viewed the process as being rooted in brotherly love.

It would therefore be wrong to insist on excommunication to promote the purity of the

church before brotherly admonition has even taken place. In this regard, he interpreted

Mt 18:15 in a broad sense, not only meaning admonition in a case where one brother sins

"against" another, but also where one becomes aware of the sin of another brother and

[203] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 94. In *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 9, E.A. McKee points out: "The theory of a plurality of leaders in the church and the nature of the <<Calvinist>> (*sic*) argument for an autonomous ecclesiastical office of discipline have long been two of the Reformed tradition's most distinctive ecclesiastical features," the latter one being "one of the most controversial issues in early Protestant history."
[204] Van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 96-98 and 141. In footnote 182 on page 96, van Ginkel points out that the task of the elders in the oversight of the doctrine and life of the ministers of the Word can already be seen in the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in 1586.
[205] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 449-453.

warns him accordingly. Bucer also emphasized the importance of patient admonition,

something that he did not see the Anabaptists and Spiritualists putting into practice. In his

opinion their approach did not reflect the mercy of Christ. He regarded excommunication

as more than just an instrument for excluding someone. It was to be used as a last resort,

the ultimate form of brotherly admonition.[206]

Bucer's Influence

Because of complications between the government and the church in Strasbourg,

Bucer was unable to put his ideals regarding church discipline into practice as he would

have liked. However, significant progress was made in the French refugee congregation

in Strasbourg while Calvin worked there, as well as in the Dutch refugee congregation in

London. The way things went in the Dutch refugee congregation in turn had an impact on

the development of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.[207]

Bucer contributed to the development of a number of church orders. Aside from

the one written together with Oecolampadius and Blaurer for the city of Ulm (1531),

mention can be made of church orders for Strasbourg (1534), Hessen (1538/39) as well as

for a congregation in Doornik and for the refugee congregation in London. The refugee

congregations often served as examples for churches established elsewhere. This in turn

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[206] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 72-73, 75. See also van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 100, who indicates that Bucer regarded the nature of church discipline as being pedagogical and motivated by love.
[207] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 94-95. In regard to Bucer's difficulties in promoting church discipline in Strasbourg, see van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 98-101 and Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 143-151, 211-217, and 269-271. For a rather critical assessment of the complications that arose in connection with Bucer's efforts to promote church discipline in the context of "core-churches" (*"ecclesiolae in ecclesia"* or *"Christliche Gemeinschaften"*) within the larger church community of Strasbourg, see James Kittelson, "Martin Bucer and the ministry of the church," in *Martin Bucer: Reforming church and community*, ed. D.F. Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 89-94. Gottfried Hammann provides theological background information and a more balanced perspective in his article: "Ecclesiological motifs behind the creation of the 'Christlichen Gemeinschaften,'" in *Martin Bucer: Reforming church and community*, ed. D.F. Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 129-143.

had an impact on the Reformed tradition in the centuries that followed.[208] Evidence of

this impact is also visible in the Canadian Reformed Church Order.

Calvin, who was forced to leave Geneva in 1538, came to Strasbourg. There,

Bucer influenced him in significant ways.[209] Bucer had an impact on Calvin's theology as

well as on his views in practical matters, such as through his concept of a fourfold office

and its implementation, a cautious approach in pastoral care, and a biblical basis for

church polity. On the other hand, Bucer was strengthened in his conceptions by seeing

Calvin put them into practice in a small congregation of refugees in Strasbourg. For

example, Calvin had a consistory with twelve elders serving next to the minister, helping

to rule the congregation and give pastoral care to the members. This in turn encouraged

Bucer to promote the same ideas in England.[210]

Bucer influenced the course of the Reformation in England, sowing the seeds for

what later became Puritanism, but also affecting the development of Anglicanism. Next

to this he had an impact on the refugee congregations in London. What he wrote

concerning the distinction between the offices of elder and deacon as well as concerning

their ordination and the questions posed to them is reflected in John à Lasco's *Forma ac*

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[208] Van 't Spijker, "De ambten bij Martin Bucer," 121-123.

[209] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 90; van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 124-125. Van 't Spijker notes that various authors have focused on Bucer's influence on Calvin's view of office. Among others, he makes reference to an address given by G. Anrich about Bucer's importance for the delineation of the four offices in Calvin's Church Order of 1541, as well as studies by J. Courvoisier, F. Wendel, and H. Strohl: G. Anrich, *Strassburg und die calvinische Kirchenverfassung* (Tübingen, 1928), 13ff.; J. Courvoisier, "Bucer et Calvin," in *Calvin à Strasbourg 1538-1541: Quatuor Études*. Strasbourg, 1938; "Bucer et l'oeuvre de Calvin," *RThPh 21* (1933): 66-77; F. Wendel, *Calvin: Sources et évolution de sa pensée religieuse*, (Paris, 1950); H. Strohl, "Bucer et Calvin," *BSHP* (1938): 354-60; cited in van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 4.

[210] Van 't Spijker, "De ambten bij Martin Bucer," 123. Van 't Spijker also speaks of the mutual appreciation that Bucer and Calvin had for each other and their impact on each other in *Geest, Woord en Kerk*, 94-113. See also his chapter on "Bucer und Calvin" in Christian Krieger and Marc Lienhard, Volume One, *Martin Bucer and Sixteenth Century Europe: Actes du colloque de Strasbourg (28-31 août 1991)*, in the series by Heiko A. Oberman, ed., *Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought*, vol. LII (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 461-470.

Ratio and in the "Christian ordinances in the Dutch congregations at London" written by

Micronius. In turn, this had lasting effects on Reformed churches in Europe.[211]

Bucer's emphasis on equality among the elders, the connection between the Word

from the pulpit and the Word brought into the homes, and the role of elders in church

discipline resonates strongly among the Canadian Reformed Churches. The close

connection between the office of elder and that of deacons (cf. Bucer's characterization

of them as "a third kind of presbyter") is evident in Article 39 of the Church Order of the

Canadian Reformed Churches, which specifies: "Where the number of elders is small, the

deacons may be added to the consistory by local arrangement; this shall invariably be

done where the number of elders or the number of deacons is less than three."[212] This

stipulation is an application of what is expressed in Article 30 of the Belgic Confession

concerning the cooperation of the ministers, elders, and deacons in the government of the

church.[213]

Further discussion about cooperation between elders and deacons took place at

the Synod of Emden (1571). The regional Synod of Dordrecht (1574) clarified that in

small churches the deacons could form part of the consistory and function as "assistant

elders." The Synod of Middelburg (1581) defined "consistory" as being composed only

of ministers and elders, with deacons having separate meetings, but the Synod of The

Hague (1586) affirmed that deacons could be added to the consistory, and the Synod of

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[211] Van 't Spijker, *The Ecclesiastical Offices*, 455-459. J.V. Pollet also mentions Bucer's influence on à Lasco's *Forma ac Ratio* in, *Martin Bucer: Études sur les relations de Bucer avec les Pays-Bas, l'Électorat de Cologne et l'Allemagne du Nord, avec de nombreux texts inédits: Tome I, Études,* Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, Heiko A. Oberman, ed., vol. XXXIII (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985), 292.

[212] *Book of Praise,* 667.

[213] *Book of Praise,* 465.

Utrecht (1905) added that this should always take place when there would otherwise be less than three office bearers in the consistory.[214]

Van 't Spijker has listed a number of useful insights in regard to Bucer's concept of office and its value. The office does not come from the congregation, but from the triune God who gives special gifts for the office and works through the office bearers in the congregation. The ecclesiastical office cannot function without a congregation, but the congregation can also not function without the office. Equipped and called by God, office bearers do their work "opposite" the congregation even while being a part of it. They are basically elders, but according to their gifts they are elected and function as overseers, elders and deacons who have a shared responsibility for the work to be done. Van 't Spijker concludes that "Bucer's ideas have become part of the Reformed tradition through Calvin. They can still be useful for keeping this tradition from becoming rigid."[215]

Calvin

John Calvin was born on July 10, 1509, in Noyon, Picardy. In 1523, he went to Paris, first studying Latin and then preparing for the priesthood for five years. In 1528, at the instigation of his father, who had a conflict with the ecclesiastical authorities in Noyon, Calvin switched to studying law. After studying law in Orléans and Bourges, he went back to Paris in 1531 to study the classics as well as Hebrew. From the summer of 1532 to the summer of 1533, he studied law once again in Orléans.

During 1533, Calvin became increasingly convinced by the teachings of the Reformers, finally undergoing what he later described as "a sudden conversion." Before

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[214] Joh. Jansen, *Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordening* (1923; reprint, Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1976), 174-175.

[215] Van 't Spijker, "De ambten bij Martin Bucer," 127.

long, an increasing number of people came to him for instruction in Reformed doctrine. After Nicolas Cop, rector of the university of Paris, held a speech on November 1, 1533 in which Calvin had a hand, both Cop and Calvin had to flee from Paris. Calvin then spent about two and a half years at different locations. He developed his thoughts further, publishing in March, 1536 the first of what would in later years become successively more extensive editions of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. More travels followed, leading him to Geneva in July, 1536, where Farel impressed upon him the need to help further the cause of the Reformation in that city. He served there until ordered to leave in April, 1538, after which he settled in Strasbourg, becoming the minister of the French refugee congregation there in September, 1538. After working in Strasbourg for three years, he returned to Geneva in September, 1541, remaining there until his death on May 27, 1564.[216]

The Focus on Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit

When discussing the views of Bucer and Calvin on ecclesiastical offices, it is good to reflect on their point of departure. François Wendel observes: "Whereas Luther regarded the ecclesiastical organization as dependent upon time and circumstances, both Bucer and Calvin deduced it directly from the lordship of Christ over the Church and the gifts of the Holy Spirit."[217] That connection between Jesus Christ as king and the work of the Holy Spirit is a fundamental one. Within such a framework, the topic of church leadership cannot be treated merely in terms of what is practical. It must be understood theologically. If Christ would not work through the Holy Spirit, there would be no

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[216] *The New Schaff-Herzog Religious Encyclopedia*, vol. II (reprint, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1977), s.v. "John Calvin," 353-356.

[217] François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, translated by Philip Mairet (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1978), 302.

spiritual life and no church. Accordingly, van 't Spijker notes that both Bucer and Calvin

"have rightfully been called theologians of the Holy Spirit. It is at this crucial point in

their theology they were the most analogous."[218]

Calvin explains that believers can only share in the benefits of Christ's work for

them by having communion with him. Accordingly, Calvin stresses that "the Holy Spirit

is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself" (*Institutes,* III.i.1).[219] Van 't

Spijker emphasizes the importance to Calvin of Christ dwelling in believers and they in

him, noting that "Calvin's theological contemplation was permeated and dominated from

the start by this Christological and pneumatological perspective."[220]

Calvin's emphasis on the connection between Christ and the Holy Spirit had an

impact on his view of the church and of ecclesiastical office. It is not surprising therefore

that he referred to the ministry of the gospel as "the administration of the Spirit and of

righteousness and of eternal life [II Cor. 4:6; 3:9]" (*Institutes*, IV.iii.3).

Calvin's view of ecclesiastical office was influenced by various church fathers,

such as Cyprian, Augustine, Jerome, and others of that era.[221] Augustine in particular had

a strong impact on Calvin.[222] Calvin was a second-generation Reformer. Because of this,

his view of ecclesiastical offices was also influenced by Luther, but he tempered Luther's

views and also integrated insights from such men as Melanchthon, Bucer, Zwingli and

[218] Willem van 't Spijker, "Bucer's influence on Calvin: church and community," in *Martin Bucer: Reforming church and community*, ed. D.F. Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 33. See also Greschat, *Martin Bucer*, 148. François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, translated by Philip Mairet (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1978), 302.
[219] J. Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Library of Christian Classics - Volumes XX and XXI, John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960, 1973), 538. All further quotes from the Institutes, unless indicated otherwise, are from this edition.
[220] Van 't Spijker, "Bucer's influence on Calvin," 35.
[221] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 99.
[222] P.J. Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," in *Gereformeerde ampsbediening*, ed. P.J. Rossouw (Pretoria: N.G. Kerkboekhandel, 1988), 146. A lengthy list of references to Augustine can be found in the Author and Source index of Calvin's *Institutes* in J. Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, The Library of Christian Classics – vol. XXI, 1594-1601.

Oecolampadius.[223] The results of his interactions with fellow Reformers as well as with Roman Catholics and Anabaptists continue to be relevant today also in regard to ecclesiastical offices, since the descendants of these three groups continue to be represented in theological reflection.

Calvin took Christ's office as Mediator as his point of departure for discussing ecclesiastical office.[224] He described Christ's work in terms of a threefold office, namely that of prophet (*Institutes,* II.xv.1-2), king (*Institutes,* II.xv.3-5) and priest (*Institutes,* II.xv.6).[225] Graafland points out that Calvin did not directly connect the Christ's threefold office to ecclesiastical offices (*Institutes*, II.xv). Instead, Calvin saw a connection between Christ as prophet and the fact that all church members share in the prophetic anointing of Christ. Christ has entrusted his teaching to the congregation and his teaching is maintained through the ministry of the Word. The connection therefore goes from Christ to the congregation and from there to preaching. Graafland sees this pattern expressed in the *Institutes*, IV.i and IV.iii. He indicates, however, that office bearers have a dual function, since Christ works through them, but they also represent the congregation to whom the prophetic doctrine of Christ has been entrusted.[226]

The Church and her Ministry

Calvin distinguished between the visible and invisible church (*Institutes*, IV.i.2 and 7). This was a reaction to the Roman Catholic emphasis on the visible church being the true church.[227] In the Catechism of Geneva, Calvin highlighted the invisible aspect of

[223] Trimp, *Ministerium,* 95.

[224] Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," 128.

[225] This approach is reflected in Lord's Day 12 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which explains the threefold office of Christ as prophet, priest, and king, and how Christians share in his anointing. See the *Book of Praise,* 485-486.

[226] Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt,* 260-263.

[227] Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," 131.

the church by defining the church it in terms of election as "The body and society of

believers whom God predestined to eternal life."[228] This distinction, however, does not

mean that Calvin wished to minimize the importance of the visible characteristics of the

church. In a well-known passage, Calvin emphasized her role as that of "mother," "for

there is no other way to enter into life unless this mother conceive us in her womb, give

us birth, nourish us at her breast, and lastly, unless she keep us under her care and

guidance until, putting off mortal flesh, we become like the angels (Matt. 22:30)"

(*Institutes*, IV.i.4, cf. IV.i.1).

Calvin confessed that there is only one church of Jesus Christ in the world. Given

the fact that believers do not assemble in one place, it is necessary to discern what the

marks of the church are. In 1536, he already singled out two basic marks: that the "holy

gospel be purely and faithfully preached, proclaimed, heard, and kept" and that the

"sacraments be properly administered, even if there be some imperfections and faults, as

there always will be among men." It is worth noting that even though in this case Calvin

does not list church discipline as a third mark of the church, it is actually subsumed under

the first mark.[229]

Office Bearers as Instruments

Calvin explains that the Lord "uses the ministry of men to declare openly his will

to us by mouth, as a sort of delegated work, not by transferring to them his right and

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[228] Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," 130.

[229] Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," 130-131. One can see discipline being implied in connection with the pure proclamation of the Word and the proper administration of the sacraments in the *Institutes*, IV.i.9, where he writes: "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached *and heard*, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists [cf. Eph. 2:20]." In the same section he also writes: "But we must think otherwise of the whole multitude itself. If it has the ministry of the Word *and honors it*, if it has the administration of the sacraments, it deserves without doubt to be held and considered a church" (italics in the quotes added for emphasis, AJP).

honor, but only that through their mouths he may do his own work – just as a workman uses a tool to do his work" (*Institutes*, IV.iii.1). He speaks of God's "regard for us" in using men as his ambassadors in the world. He states that "this human ministry which God uses to govern the church is the chief sinew by which believers are held together in one body" (IV.iii.2).

Calvin developed his view of ecclesiastical offices on the basis of such passages as Ephesians 4, 1 Co 12:28 and Ro 12:7, 8. These passages led him to distinguish between temporary and permanent offices.[230] This should not be taken to mean that in his conception the "temporary" offices were completely unique to the beginning of the history of the early Christian church. While acknowledging their foundational character, Calvin saw aspects in these offices that could arise later as well. What can be called "permanent" offices are those which are of importance for the continuation of the daily life of the church in subsequent centuries. Another way of distinguishing these offices was to speak of "extraordinary" and "ordinary" offices. The latter terminology shows that the distinction is not necessarily a chronological one (*Institutes*, IV.iii.4).

Graafland stresses that when looking for the biblical basis for ecclesiastical office, the choice of which Bible passage to use as a starting point is an important hermeneutical decision. He indicates that Ephesians 4 was important for Calvin, since it mentions the various offices in more detail than 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, although none of these passages mentions the offices of pastor (and teacher), elder, and deacon together.[231]

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[230] Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," 131.
[231] Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt*, 61-62.

According to Graafland, Calvin's doctrine of office in the *Institutes* is based on Eph 4:11, but in his commentaries 1 Ti 5:17 is central.[232] It seems, however, that the prominent position of 1 Ti 5:17 in Calvin's reasoning applies primarily to the distinction between two kinds of elders: those who teach and those whose task is related to the government of the church, in particular in relation to maintaining discipline, acting "as censors for the correction of morals."[233]

Giving a detailed explanation of what Calvin wrote about various offices next to that of elders would go beyond the scope of this dissertation. For this reason, only some details will be mentioned in order to give an impression of some of his insights and to show that the church today is not in a state of poverty without the so-called "temporary" offices. Essentially the point is that not everything done in the past needs to be repeated. What office bearers do today in many respects either involves building on the foundation once laid by people who had "temporary" offices, or continuing their activity in one way or another.

Apostles

Calvin relates the function of apostles to the command given by Christ: "'Go, preach the gospel to every creature' [Mark 16:15]." They were to lay the foundation for the church throughout the world. In regard to Eph 4:11, where Paul mentions apostles,

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[232] Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt*, 198.

[233] J. Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T.A. Smail, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries (1964; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 262. In *De Ouderling*, 138-139, van Ginkel states that when explaining 1 Ti 5:17 in the *Institutes*, Calvin stresses the distinction between ministers of the Word and elders, while in his commentary on the same verse he stresses that the two offices are actually one. It is puzzling that van Ginkel comes to this conclusion, especially since he even gives a partial quote of a statement from Calvin's commentary that is in complete harmony with the position Calvin took in the *Institutes*: "From this passage it may be inferred that there are two kinds of presbyters, since they were not all ordained to teach. The plain meaning of the words is that there were some who ruled well and honourably, but who did not hold a teaching office."

prophets, and evangelists, Calvin states "the Lord raised up the first three at the beginning

of his Kingdom, and now and again revives them as the need of the times demands."

Although he acknowledges that "the Lord has sometimes at a later period raised up

apostles, or at least evangelists in their place," he maintains that the office of apostle or

"at least evangelists" is "extraordinary" because "in duly constituted churches it has no

place" (*Institutes*, IV.iii.4).[234]

Prophets

Calvin does not regard the role of New Testament prophets as simply being

"interpreters of God's will." Rather they "excelled in a particular revelation [Eph. 4:11]."

Concerning such men, he comments: "This class either does not exist today or is less

commonly seen" (*Institutes*, IV.iii.4). In his commentary on Eph 4:11, Calvin explains

the term "prophets" as referring to "outstanding interpreters of prophecies, who, by a

unique gift of revelation, applied them to the subjects on hand." This does not, however,

mean that it would "exclude the gift of foretelling, so far as it was connected with

teaching."[235]

Calvin sees a connection between the work of the prophets and that of teachers.

"The prophetic office was more eminent on account of the singular gift of revelation in

which they excelled. But the office of teachers is very similar in character and has exactly

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[234] In regard to Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.iii.4, footnote 4 on page 1057 points to "Calvin's *Defensio adversus Pighium*, where Luther is called 'a distinguished apostle of Christ by whose ministry the light of the gospel has shone' (CR VI.250)."

[235] J. Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T.H.L. Parker, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 179. In his comments on 1 Co 12:28 and 14:6, Calvin takes the position that prophesying involves interpretation and specific application adapted to "the immediate need of the church" or "the needs of the hour" by revelation from God . See J. Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. John W. Fraser, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 271 and 288.

the same purpose" (*Institutes*, IV.iii.5). In commenting on Ac 13:1, Calvin indicates that

the terms "prophets and teachers" can be synonyms, describing "outstanding interpreters

of Scripture." Their task is that of "teaching and exhorting as Paul gives us to understand

in 1 Cor. 14.29."[236]

Calvin expresses his conviction that the term "prophets" in 1 Co 12:28 does not

refer to "those endowed with the gift of foretelling." He explains that these prophets must

be people "who are blessed with the unique gift of dealing with Scripture, not only by

interpreting it, but also by the wisdom they showed in making it meet the needs of the

hour." Having said this, he acknowledges that other opinions are also possible, since "it is

difficult to make up one's mind about gifts and offices, of which the Church has been

deprived for so long, except for mere traces or shades of them, which are still to be

found."[237]

In his comments on 1 Th 5:21, Calvin interprets Paul's admonition "do not treat

prophecies with contempt" to mean that "the course of doctrine should not be prevented

by any human error, any unconsidered view, ignorance, or indeed by any abuse, from

having continual prosperity in the Church. Since the abolition of prophecy means the

destruction of the Church, let us allow heaven and earth to fall into disorder rather than

that prophecy should cease." It is clear in this context, that Calvin takes "prophesying" to

mean the teaching of doctrine and not foretelling the future. He urges his readers to be

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[236] J. Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles 1-13*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. John W. Fraser and W.J.G. McDonald, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 351. See also Calvin's remarks on Ro 12:6 in J. Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Ross Mackenzie, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 269. In his remarks on 1 Th 5:21 on page 378, Calvin connects prophesying and the teaching of doctrine.
[237] J. Calvin, in *The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians*, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. John W. Fraser (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd Ltd., 1960; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 271.

patient with the possible shortcomings of those who prophesy since some "have less instruction than they ought to have, while at other times good and godly teachers miss the mark."[238]

Evangelists

In his commentary on Eph 4:11, Calvin does not give much of an explanation concerning evangelists. He writes that they were like apostles, "but of an inferior rank," mentioning Timothy as an example, in describing their task is that of "subsidiaries to the apostles." According to him, the office of evangelist is not "perpetual" such as that of "pastors and doctors." However, he does mention that "where religion has broken down," God "raises up evangelists apart from Church order (*extra ordinem*), to restore the pure doctrine to its lost position."[239] Calvin remarks in connection with Ac 21:7-8 that evangelists are "half-way between apostles and teachers." Like the apostles, they preached in all sorts of places and as indicated by the apostle Paul in Eph 4:11, "were given a wider field for teaching than the pastors, whose labour was devoted to definite places."[240]

Among the evangelists, in Calvin's opinion, were men such as Luke, Timothy, Titus, and others, maybe even the seventy disciples mentioned in Luke 10:1 (*Institutes*, IV.iii.4). Rossouw notes that Goumaz, who summarized Calvin's view of office in the light of his commentaries on the New Testament, indicated that evangelists continued

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[238] Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, 378.

[239] Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, 179.

[240] J. Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles 14-28*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. John W. Fraser, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1966; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 194.

where the apostles left off, completing what was unfinished. This included appointing

elders and pastors and developing rules for church life and discipline.[241]

Pastors and Teachers

Calvin regards pastors as the men who took the place of the apostles. In reference

to them, the apostle Paul used terms such as "ministers" or "servants" and "stewards"

(1 Co 4:1). Calvin also interprets the term "bishop" (NIV: "overseer, " Tit 1:7) as a

reference to pastors (*Institutes*, IV.iii.6), and in his comments on 1 Ti 3:1 he regards it as

equivalent to "minister, pastor, or presbyter."[242]

Paul's reference to "pastors and teachers" Eph 4:11 has been interpreted in more

than one way. Some take the expression as applying to one and the same group of people.

Calvin, however, sees a distinction here. In his opinion, the work of pastors includes not

only teaching but also discipline, administering the sacraments, and "warnings or

exhortations," while teachers occupy themselves with the interpretation of Scripture "to

keep doctrine whole and pure among believers" (*Institutes*, IV.iii.4, cf. IV.i.1 and

IV.iii.6).[243]

Calvin's position, therefore, is that Paul lists five sorts of offices in Eph 4:11.

He acknowledges that some interpret "pastors and doctors" as one office and also

acknowledges that to a degree, all pastors are also teachers. But he insists that there is

also "a particular gift of interpreting Scripture, so that sound doctrine may be kept and a

man may be a doctor who is not fitted to preach," and explains "that there is another kind

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[241] Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," 134.

[242] For his comments on 1 Ti 3:1, see *The Second Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, 223. In his explanation of Ac 20:28, Calvin notes that "according to the use of Scripture bishops differ nothing from elders." See *The Acts of the Apostles 14-28*, 183.

[243] In his comments on 1 Co 12:28, Calvin notes that "teachers" have the task of "preserving and propagating sound doctrines," but acknowledges that the term Paul uses could also refer to pastors or to all who have the ability to teach. See *The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians*, 271.

of doctor, who superintends both the education of pastors and the instruction of the whole Church."[244] Although interpreters of Scripture may not agree with Calvin's position in theory, it is clear that in the life of the church certain individuals have been assigned the task of teaching theology in an academic setting much in the way envisioned by Calvin.

In his commentary on Eph 4:11 Calvin makes it clear in a similar way that he views the roles of pastors and that of "doctors" or teachers as two offices. He explains the difference them as a difference in abilities as well as in duties, with the one being active locally, while the other gives instruction to prospective pastors and to the whole church.[245]

Elders

Wendel notes the ambiguous way in which Calvin uses the term "elder": "Sometimes the elders are at the same time pastors and elders in the technical sense; sometimes on the contrary Calvin uses the term to denote the latter only."[246] P.J. Rossouw observes this ambiguity in the *Institutes*. In the first edition of the *Institutes*, published in 1536, Calvin distinguishes only the offices of minister of the Word and deacons. But in the *"Draft Ecclesiastical Ordinances September + October 1541"* he clearly speaks of the elders as a "third order," having the responsibility for "oversight of the life of everyone."[247] Evidently during the intervening five years there was some development in his thinking on this point.

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[244] Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, 179.
[245] J. Calvin, in *The Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T.H.L. Parker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 179.
[246] Wendel, *Calvin*, 305.
[247] Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," 134-135, esp. footnote 4.

In Geneva, there were "judges of morals" (*censores morum*) who were responsible for overseeing the lifestyle of the city. Calvin strove to develop this institution along biblical lines for the benefit of the church, making reference to Ro 12:8, 1 Co 12:28 (cf. *Institutes*, IV.iii.8 and IV.xx.4), but also to 1 Ti 5:17 (*Institutes*, IV.xi.1, cf. IV.xi.6). He used 1 Ti 5:17 to develop the idea of two kinds of elders, one responsible for preaching and the other for governing. Nevertheless, he regarded discipline as a responsibility that they shared together.[248]

The growth of Calvin's insight in distinguishing two kinds of elders was the result of a development that can be traced back to Ambrose, as well as to Reformers such as Zwingli, Oecolampadius and Bucer. Gradually the understanding of what this office entailed shifted from being linked to the civil government to finally becoming recognized as actually belonging to the government of the church. Through Calvin's influence the idea of a "ruling elder" was consolidated and has had a lasting impact on Reformed churches throughout the world.[249] Once again elders had a recognized position of spiritual leadership in the church.

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[248] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 100-102. For details, see Calvin's explanation of 1 Co 12:28, where he takes "governments" as a reference to "elders (*seniores*), who were responsible for discipline." In his opinion a reference to a "'Council of the Elders' (*Senatus*)" of the early church can be found in 1 Ti 5:17, which he interprets in terms of "a twofold order (*duplicem ordinem*) of Presbyters" in *The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians*, 272. See also his commentary on 1 Ti 5:17 in *The Second Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, 262. For comments on discipline as the shared responsibility of the elders, see Calvin's explanation of 1 Co 5:4 in *The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians*, 107.

[249] Van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 142-143. As a result of historical circumstances in Geneva, the ministers of the Word together with the civil authorities played a large role in the election of the elders, although not without input from the congregation. Graafland mentions this in passing in *Gedachten over het ambt*, 93-94.

E.A. McKee discusses the development in Calvin's exegesis in regard to the elders in connection with Ro 12:8 and 1 Co 12:28 in her book *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 32, 78, 85, 188ff. and 216ff. In regard to the development of Calvin's interpretation of 1 Ti 5:17, McKee notes the influence of such men as Ambrose and Bucer. She indicates that Calvin already embraced the idea of a twofold presbyterate in the *Institutes* of 1539, linking 1 Ti 5:17 with 1 Co 12:28 and Ro 12:8, but came to a more complete explanation in his commentary on First Timothy of 1548 and in sermons of 1554-1555. See pp. 100 and 118.

Deacons

Calvin saw the origin of the office of deacons in Ac 6:3, but made reference to Ro 12:8 to distinguish between two kinds of deacons: those responsible for the distribution of alms and "administering the affairs of the poor," while others are directly involved in "the care of the poor and sick," the latter role involving not only deacons, but also women such as those referred to in 1 Ti 5:9-10 (*Institutes*, IV.iii.9).[250] Calvin notes that instead of having the deacons fulfill their actual task properly, the Roman Catholic Church degraded the office of deacons to that of priests of a lower order.[251]

The Number of Offices

Calvin repeatedly notes that there were two kinds of elders ("presbyters") in the early church: "some had been ordained to teach; others, only to be censors of morals" (*Institutes*, IV.xi.6; cf. IV.iv.1 and IV.xi.1). But he does not stop at this observation. In the *Institutes* he also explains that there were three kinds of ministers, grouping pastors and teachers together for the ministry of the Word, next to elders to govern the church, and deacons to care for the poor (*Institutes*, IV.iii.8 and IV.iv.1).

P.J. Rossouw notes that there is a difference of opinion as to whether or not Calvin regarded the office of "doctor" (*docteur*) as distinct or not. The *Confession de Foi* of the Reformed Churches in France, which he either wrote or edited, lists only three offices: pastor, overseers, and deacons: "*pasteur, surveillans,* and *diacres* (Dankbaar 1964: 149f.)." However, in the "Ecclesiastical Ordinances" of 1541, "doctors" are mentioned as

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[250] In his commentary on Ro 12:8, Calvin takes the term "one who gives" as referring to deacons while he interprets the term referring to "one who shows mercy" as a reference to "widows and other ministers, who were appointed to take care of the sick, according to the custom of the ancient Church." See in *Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, 270. Calvin provides further information on the deacons and outlines historical developments in connection with their ministry in the *Institutes*, IV.iv.1 and IV.iv.5-9.

[251] Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," 145.

a separate office. According to Rossouw, ultimately the issue is not the number of offices, but their "theological foundation, source and goal."[252]

Trimp concludes that Calvin has successfully identified three cores of scriptural office: preaching (and, in connection with that, the administration of the sacraments), discipline and diaconate. The exegetical foundations of this structure can use strengthening, but as far as Trimp is concerned, the structure is solid.[253] The three cores identified by Calvin are recognizable in the development of the offices of minister, elder, and deacon. Reformed churches continue to hold these offices in honour to this day.

The Call to Office

Calvin deals with the subject of the call to office in the *Institutes*, IV.iii.10-16. His point of departure is that "everything should be done in a fitting an orderly way" (1 Co 14:40). He emphasizes the importance of observing good order in calling someone to the ministry so that "noisy and troublesome men" will not be admitted. A man must be "duly called (Heb 5:4)" and "he must respond to his calling, that is, he must undertake and carry out the tasks enjoined" (*Institutes*, IV.iii.10).

Calvin makes worthwhile remarks in regard to the "secret" or inner call to office. He describes this as "the good witness of our heart that we receive the proffered office not with ambition or avarice, not with any other selfish desire, but with a sincere fear of God and desire to build up the church." In regard to preparation for office he stresses "learning joined with piety and the other gifts of the good pastor," which are essential for fulfilling the tasks properly (*Institutes*, IV.iii.11).

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[252] Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," 135-136. The *Confession de Foi* was written in 1559. The four offices are listed in the "Ordonnances Ecclésiastiques," in Jean-François Bergier, *Registres de la Compagnie des Pasteurs de Genève au Temps de Calvin: Tome Premier 1546-1553* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1964), 1.

[253] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 102.

In discussing the "outer call" by the church, Calvin subdivides the topic into four parts: what sort of ministers they should be, how they should be appointed, by whom they should be appointed, and by what rite or ceremony they should be installed (*Institutes*, IV.iii.11-16).

In regard to who should choose the ministers, Calvin explains that no rule can be derived from how the apostles were chosen, since they had an extraordinary office and were specially called by Christ (*Institutes*, IV.iii.13). However, he goes on to point out that even the apostle Paul, who was chosen by Jesus Christ, was nevertheless set apart by the church together with Barnabas (Ac 13:2) in order to do mission work (*Institutes*, IV.iii.14).

Calvin attaches special significance to the role of the church in the appointment to an office. Comparing Scripture with Scripture, he notes that the appointment of presbyters, as indicated in Tit 1:5 and 1 Ti 5:22, does not exclude the involvement of the church as a whole (Ac 14:23, cf. Ac 1:15ff; 6:2-7). He also illustrates this procedure from the Old Testament where Levitical priests were brought before the people before being consecrated (*Institutes*, IV.iii.15). Calvin concludes: "We therefore hold that this call of a minister is lawful according to the Word of God, when those who seemed fit are created by the consent and approval of the people; moreover, that other pastors ought to preside over the election in order that the multitude may not go wrong either through fickleness, through evil intentions, or through disorder" (*Institutes*, IV.iii.15).[254]

It is interesting to note Calvin's observations in regard to ordination to office. According to him, this involves the laying on of hands, a custom which has roots in the

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[254] On Calvin's view of the importance of the involvement of the congregation in the election of office bearers, see van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 128-129 and 131.

Old Testament and which was continued by the apostles and others after them. This ritual was observed in regard to pastors and teachers as well as deacons, either done by one pastor or by more than one together (Ac 6:6; 13:3; 2 Ti 1:6; 1 Ti 4:14). Although there is no explicit command for this to be done, Calvin sees sufficient basis for its continuation in its observance by the apostles. It highlights "the dignity of the ministry" and also serves "to warn the one ordained that he is no longer a law unto himself, but bound in servitude to God and the church" (*Institutes*, IV.iii.16).

The Government of the Church

Calvin's views of church government must be seen in terms of "Christocracy," with Jesus Christ as the sole Head of the church.[255] According to him, the church has power, but only that which has been given by Christ, who has the ultimate authority (*Institutes*, IV.viii.1). Office bearers are like tools in Christ's hands, serving as his ambassadors to represent him (*Institutes*, IV.iii.1, cf. also IV.i.5).

Calvin emphasizes that the apostles had to pass on that which had been given to them by God, who guided them by the Holy Spirit. This means that their successors may not go beyond that which has been written in Scripture, which has the ultimate authority (*Institutes*, IV.viii.8-9). Accordingly, he is highly critical of "false bishops" who attempt to bind the consciences of people with laws that are not derived from the Word of God (*Institutes*, IV.x.6).

Trimp explains that when speaking of the order or polity of the church, Calvin distinguishes between what God has prescribed concerning the offices, doctrine, and discipline on the one hand, and man-made rules on the other (1 Co 14:40).[256] While

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[255] Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," 130-131; van Ginkel, *De Ouderling,* 125.
[256] Trimp, *Ministerium,* 186-187.

recognizing that human laws or regulations can become impediments to true religion,

Calvin does not go to the extreme of rejecting all such laws in favour of direct divine

commandments. He breaks through the dilemma of "divine law - human law" (*ius*

divinum - ius humanum) in the *Institutes*, IV.x.30, by approving of "those human

constitutions which are founded upon God's authority, drawn from Scripture, and,

therefore, wholly divine."[257]

Calvin realizes that the basic rule laid down by the apostle Paul in 1 Co 14:40

establishes "order" as a divine principle, while allowing people to establish this order in

specific ways as needed by the church according to the times and circumstances. Along

the same lines, it is "fitting" to make changes if this is clearly beneficial for the church. A

final comment of his in a paragraph on this topic is worth keeping in mind: "But love will

best judge what may hurt or edify; and if we let love be our guide, all will be safe"

(*Institutes*, IV.x.30).

Calvin's insights concerning the government of the church under Jesus Christ as

well as the need for establishing and maintaining order in the church in a flexible way

continue to be practised in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Ruling elders do well to

recognize the importance of this as they seek to fulfill their tasks.

The Keys of the Kingdom

Calvin regarded preaching and church discipline as keys of the kingdom.

Preaching was primary, but as a result of his contact with Bucer, Calvin increasingly

emphasized the importance of the discipline of the church.[258]

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[257] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 207.
[258] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 177, cf. 182.

For Calvin, the gospel is the treasure of the church and God has given pastors and teachers authority to preach (*Institutes*, IV.i.1). He wished neither to exaggerate the importance of the ministry of the Word nor to underestimate its value. God brings about faith and spiritual growth, but it pleases him to do this through the ministry of men (*Institutes*, IV.i.6). Accordingly, Calvin was careful to emphasize that while the power of the keys is exercised in the preaching of the gospel, the power resides not in men, but in the Word of which they are ministers (*Institutes*, IV.xi.1).

In his commentary on 2 Co 2:15, Calvin expounds on the fact that the proclamation of the Word has a twofold effect, bringing salvation to some and condemnation to others. This is related to the fact that the apostles were sent "not just to loose but also to bind, not just to remit sins, but also to retain them." Nevertheless, he stresses that the "real purpose" or "proper function *(proprium officium)*" of the preaching of the gospel is salvation, which "is always to be distinguished from what we may call its accidental function *(ab accidentali)*, which must be imputed to the depravity of men by which life is turned into death."[259]

Trimp points out that among the Reformers there was unanimity that the power of the church is connected to Christ's mandate to preach the gospel. However, there was diversity of opinion concerning church discipline.[260] E.A. McKee traces a development in Calvin's thinking on the church and on church discipline between 1536 and 1543, noting a shift in emphasis from the invisible church to the role of pastors and lay elders in the

[259] J. Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles to Timothy, Titus and Philemon*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T.A. Smail, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1964; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 34-35.
[260] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 188. E.A. McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 16, notes that "the most detailed discussion of the development of Reformed disciplinary practices is found in the three volumes of Walter Köhler's Zürcher *Ehegericht und Genfer Konsistorium*. Köhler traces the line from the marriage courts of Zurich, through the practices of Swiss and South German city-states, to the consistory of Geneva."

process of supervision and discipline in the local church.[261] In the *Institutes,* Calvin

stresses the importance of discipline next to the preaching of the Word, noting its

importance for maintaining order in the home, in society, as well as in the church. In his

opinion, "as the saving doctrine of Christ is the soul of the church, so does discipline

serve as its sinews, through which the members of the body hold together, each in its own

place" (*Institutes,* IV.xii.1).

Calvin describes the aim of "ecclesiastical jurisdiction" as being to resist offences

and to wipe out scandals, distinguishing this "spiritual power" from "the right of the

sword." He also emphasizes that "it be administered not by the decision of one man but

by a lawful assembly" (*Institutes,* IV.xi.5).[262] In its application, this discipline involves

private admonition, or if necessary, barring a person from participation in the Lord's

Supper and finally excommunication (*Institutes,* IV.xi.5, cf. IV.xi.1-2).

Calvin makes it clear that church discipline should be exercised keeping in mind

three distinct purposes: that God's name not be dishonoured by unrepentant sinners who

call themselves Christians; to prevent the church from being corrupted by association

with the wicked; and also that such sinners may be ashamed and repent (*Institutes,*

IV.xii.5).

Calvin explains the process of church discipline in the light of Mt 18:15-17. This

discipline begins with private admonitions. But, he emphasizes, "let pastors and

presbyters be especially watchful to do this, for their duty is not only to preach to the

people, but to warn and exhort in every house, wherever they are not effective enough in

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[261] McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry,* 32.

[262] McKee points out the "The theory of a plurality of leaders in the church and the nature of the <<Calvinist>> (*sic*) argument for an autonomous ecclesiastical office of discipline have long been two of the Reformed tradition's most distinctive ecclesiastical features," the latter one being "one of the most controversial issues in early Protestant history." McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry,* 9.

general instruction." When admonitions are rejected and there is no repentance despite

further admonitions given in the presence of witnesses, the matter is to be brought to the

attention of the church, represented by the assembly of the elders, who have "public

authority" to give further admonition. If there is still no repentance, the sinner is to be

excommunicated (*Institutes*, IV.xii.2).

Calvin is also realistic in recognizing that discipline cannot always be exercised.

There may be hypocrites as well as people who must be tolerated in the church "because

they cannot be convicted by a competent tribunal," i.e. for lack of evidence, "or because a

vigorous discipline does not always flourish as it ought" (*Institutes*, IV.i.7). While

acknowledging the importance of maintaining the holiness of the church, Calvin also

points out that this does not equate perfection. Sanctification by Christ is an ongoing

process in which "the Lord is daily at work in smoothing out wrinkles and cleansing

spots" (*Institutes*, IV.i.17, cf. also IV.i.18-29).

Calvin compares discipline to a bridle, a spur, and a father's rod. Lest the latter be

misunderstood, he qualifies its use as being "to chastise mildly and with the gentleness of

Christ's Spirit those who have more seriously lapsed" (*Institutes*, IV.xii.1). He is very

concerned that church discipline be exercised in a moderate way, tempering severity with

a "'spirit of gentleness' [Gal. 6:1], " and taking "particular care that he who is punished

be not overwhelmed with sorrow [II Cor. 2:7]. Thus a remedy would become

destruction" (*Institutes*, IV.xii.8).[263]

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[263] McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry*, 16, notes that the studies by William Monter and Robert M. Kingdon bring to light that Calvin's concern was "with admonition rather than punishment" (Monter), and that "the consistory's judgments were << relatively lenient>> (*sic*)" (Kingdon). On p. 31 McKee observes that "Calvin clearly and repeatedly demands moderation in discipline; excessive zeal breaks the canon of love and may lead to the <<sacrilege of schism>> (*sic*)."

To offset an emphasis on the holiness of the church that could lead to perfectionism, Calvin stresses the centrality of the ongoing ministry of reconciliation (2 Co 5:18,20). Through the ministry of the church, the promise of forgiveness continues to be proclaimed to believers and enjoyed by them in communion with the church to which the Lord has entrusted the power of the keys (*Institutes*, IV.i.22).

Trimp indicates that although Calvin emphasizes the importance of church discipline, there were shortcomings in his approach. In the first place, Trimp regrets that Calvin based his doctrine concerning church discipline on Matthew 18 (*Institutes*, IV.xi and xii), while interpreting Matthew 16 and John 20 in connection with doctrine and the preaching of the gospel, although Calvin does see they are connected. In the second place he notes that Calvin unfortunately uses loaded terms such as "ecclesiastical jurisdiction," "spiritual jurisdiction," and "church court" (*Institutes*, IV.iii.8 and IV.xi.4 and 5). In Trimp's opinion, this leads to a tension with his rejection of the idea of a church court when he deals with the Roman Catholic confessional. In the third place, although Trimp agrees with Calvin that no society can exist without a government, such a statement does not highlight the unique character of the government of the church through the Word that is preached.

The problem that Trimp has with the term "jurisdiction" is that it does not contain a reference to the pastoral nature of church discipline. The only argument he sees in favour of the term "jurisdiction" is that it indicates that a judgment concerning the sinner is done by a group of people and not just by one individual.[264]

Trimp hesitates to conclude that Calvin's approach to church discipline was more juridical than pastoral, since there are arguments to the contrary. But he sympathizes with

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[264] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 183-184.

objections to the term "jurisdiction" that have arisen in Reformed churches from the 17th century onward and indicates that it is advisable not to let this impede the development of the doctrine of church discipline as an application of the keys of the kingdom of heaven.[265]

Principles of Pastoral Care

John H. Leith explains that for Calvin, "pastoral care is not only comfort for the bereaved, forgiveness for the guilty, and help for the sick and needy; it is pre-eminently the renewal of life in the image of Christ. Pastoral care has as its purpose not only the giving of comfort, but also the redirection of life." He goes on to say that "in the care of souls, Calvin not only was concerned for the salvation of the individual; but he also united this salvation with the advancement of the reign of Jesus Christ."[266]

Calvin was very critical of the Roman Catholic confessional. His concern was that it was not an effective instrument against sin. In his opinion, the practice of Paul in Ac 20:20 points in another direction: visiting "from house to house," offering people instruction, comfort and admonition in a private setting according to their personal needs. Accordingly, beginning in 1550, Calvin instituted the practice of annual home visits throughout the congregation by a minister of the Word together with an elder.[267] Calvin stressed the importance of not only teaching people in public, but also showing care for them in their homes, "for general teaching will often have a cold reception, unless it is

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[265] Trimp, *Ministerium*, 185-186.

[266] John H. Leith, *An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition: A Way of Being in the Christian Community* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977), 82. Leith attributes these insights to a study written by Jean-Daniel Benoit: *Calvin, Directeur d'Ames* (Strasbourg: Editions Oberlin, 1947).

[267] Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," 144.

helped by advice given in private."[268] Such considerations continue to be of value for

maintaining the practice of annual home visits in the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Rossouw characterizes the relationship between office and pastoral care in

Calvin's thought as ministry ("service"). An office bearer is an instrument of God, who

uses workers in the vineyard (Mt 20:1). All believers are called to help each other, but as

official ambassadors of Christ, pastors and elders are especially called to give

encouragement, support, as well as to exercise oversight and discipline in the

congregation.[269]

Rossouw notes that J. D. Benoit lists ten aspects brought forward by Calvin in

regard to pastoral care: contact, humility, persistence, giving leadership, biblical, frank,

using common sense, simplicity, being humane, and having a twofold purpose: to

strengthen, encourage and support (believers) in Christ Jesus, as well as furthering the

progress of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.[270]

Calvin's Influence

Andrew Pettigrew observes that in regard to "Calvin's organization of the

Genevan church, the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances* of 1541 is rightly viewed as a milestone

of church-forming. In the *Ecclesiastical Ordinances,* Calvin's talents and personal

experiences, his lawyer's training and his recent observation of Bucer's work in

Strasbourg, combined to inspire a brilliant synthesis of previous Protestant church

orders."[271]

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[268] Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles 14-28*, 175.

[269] Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," 143-144.

[270] Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," 143. The book referred to by Rossouw is a Dutch translation of what Benoit originally wrote in French: *Calvin, Directeur d'Ames* (Strasbourg: Editions Oberlin, 1947).

[271] Andrew Pettigrew, "The Spread of Calvin's Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 217.

The Headship of Jesus Christ

Calvin's emphasis on the authority of the Word of God and on the headship of Jesus Christ resonated strongly in the Reformed churches. Article 29 of the Belgic Confession refers to Jesus Christ as "the only Head" of the church. Article 30 teaches that Christ governs his church through his Word, using ministers or pastors, along with elders and deacons as his instruments. Article 31 speaks of him as "the only universal Bishop and the only Head of the Church." Article 32 stresses that while church government requires order, those responsible for this must not "deviate from what Christ, our only Master, has commanded." This Confession takes a minimalist approach, expressing the resolve only to accept "what is proper to preserve and promote harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God."[272]

The typical Calvinistic opposition to hierarchy in the church can be found in Article 31 of the Belgic Confession, which stresses that "ministers of the Word, in whatever place they are, have equal power and authority, for they are all servants of Jesus Christ, the only universal Bishop and Head of the church."[273] Resistance to hierarchy can also be found in the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches (Articles 73 and 74). The Word of God must reign supreme, also over the decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies (Article 31). That same Word also obligates the churches to strive to uphold their promise to "endeavour diligently" to abide by the mutually agreed upon order for the churches (cf. Article 76 and Mt 5:37).[274]

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[272] *Book of Praise*, 463-466. On the headship of Jesus Christ, see also Q&A 49, 50 and 57 of the Heidelberg Catechism, and Chapter I,7 of the Canons of Dort, which are confessional documents of the Canadian Reformed Churches along with the Belgic Confession. The references to the Catechism and the Canons of Dort can be found in the *Book of Praise,* 492, 493, 496, 534.
[273] *Book of Praise,* 465.
[274] *Book of Praise,* 674, 664, and 675.

When it comes to the structure of offices in Reformed churches under Jesus Christ as Head, Calvin's views have had the most influence. The fundamental principles have remained the same, although the argumentation for various points has undergone some revision and expansion. There are also practical differences necessitated by circumstances. In this regard, the flexibility that he displayed in regard to the interpretation and application of various Scripture passages has been maintained.

Church Discipline

There is no doubt about the importance of church discipline in Calvin's thought. However, there has been some discussion as to whether or not he regards discipline as the third mark of the church, next to the pure preaching of the Word and the proper administration of the sacraments. Although he does not speak explicitly about discipline in this way, Rossouw points out that it does function as such in his writings. He mentions the fact that Calvin refers to discipline as a sign of a "well ordered" church in a response to a letter from Cardinal Sadoletus. Rossouw also mentions various paragraphs in Calvin's *Institutes* (III.iv.12-36; IV.i-iv, viii, xii, xx), as well as Reformed confessions of his day that show signs of his influence, such as the Scottish Confession of Faith of 1560, written by John Knox together with other authors, the Belgic Confession (1561), composed by Guido de Brès, and the Hungarian Confession (1562), patterned after the *Confessio christianae fidei* of Theodorus Beza.[275]

The nature, purpose, and process of church discipline as described in the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches (Articles 66-72)[276] give evidence of insights that can be found in Calvin's *Institutes* (IV.xii.1-13) as well as in his Commentaries. This

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[275] Rossouw, "Aspekte van die ampsbeskouwing van Calvyn," 140-141.
[276] *Book of Praise*, 672-674.

is a further explication and application of principles concerning church discipline that can already be found in the Belgic Confession (Articles 30 and 32), the Heidelberg Catechism (Question and Answer 85) and the Canons of Dort (Chapter III/IV,17).[277]

In regard to steps to be observed in exercising church discipline, van Ginkel notes that the church order of Geneva was more explicit than that of Strasbourg. It also indicated that secret sins should be dealt with differently than public sins. Secret sins should be dealt with in a confidential way, whereas if a sin is public, the congregation should be informed that consistory is dealing with it. This distinction was to have a lasting impact on subsequent Reformed church orders.[278] It can also be found in Articles 66-69 of the church order of the Canadian Reformed Churches.[279]

The history of the Forms for the Excommunication of non-communicant and for communicant members used by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands goes back to the second half of the 16th Century. These churches amplified and fine-tuned the Forms further in the 20th Century.[280] The Forms, which are also in use in the Canadian Reformed Churches, clearly show the influence of John Calvin. Together with articles in the Church Order concerning the nature, purpose and process of church discipline (Articles 66-72), they give evidence of many insights that can be found in Calvin's *Institutes* (cf. IV.xii.1-13) and Commentaries.[281]

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[277] *Book of Praise*, 464-466, 510, 559.

[278] Van Ginkel, *De Ouderling*, 121 and 137. Cf. also Calvin's *Institutes*, IV.xii.2 and 3.

[279] *Book of Praise*, 673-674.

[280] Trimp, C. (1978). *Formulieren en gebeden:Een beschrijving van de liturgische formulieren en gebeden in het gereformeerde kerkboek*. Kampen: Copieerinrichting v.d. Berg, 58-62. See also G. Van Rongen, *Our Reformed Church Service Book* (Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada / Pella, Iowa, U.S.A: Inheritance Publications, 1995), 220-222.

[281] See the "Form for the Excommunication of Non-communicant Members" and the "Form for the Excommunication of Communicant Members" as well as the "Form for Readmission into the Church of Christ" in the *Book of Praise*, 607-618.

Refining Calvin's Insights

G. Van Rongen traces the gradual development of Forms for Ordination or Installation of office bearers in Reformed churches from 1568 onward.[282] They clearly exhibit Calvin's influence. However, in the course of time insights provided by Calvin were refined, with an important consensus being achieved at the National Synod of Dordrecht (1618-1619) in regard to liturgical forms for the ordination of ministers, elders, and deacons. A "Form for the Ordination (or Installation) of Missionaries" was added by the Synod of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands (1971-1973) and some changes were made by the same churches in 1975 in the "Form for the Ordination (or Installation) of ministers" as well as to the "Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons," especially to strengthen the biblical basis. These Forms were later adopted and expanded in English by the Canadian Reformed Churches, with further attention being given to the biblical basis.[283]

An example of a further refinement of Calvin's insights can be found in the Canadian Reformed Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons, which gives a more positively focused explanation of the work of elders than Calvin. He links their work primarily to the "government" of the church, with the emphasis being on "discipline," the purpose of which he describes in line with the early Church as being "to keep the people in uprightness of life."[284] In the Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons, emphasis is still placed on the theme of discipline in regard to the work of elders, but the elements

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[282] Van Rongen, *Our Reformed Church Service Book*, 222-227, esp. 225.

[283] Van Rongen, *Our Reformed Church Service Book*, 227. While expressing appreciation for Calvin's contribution, C. Trimp also indicated that the exegetical basis for Calvin's distinction between preaching (including the sacraments), discipline and diaconal work could use strengthening. See *Ministerium*, 102.

[284] Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul The Apostle to the Corinthians*, 272, where he explains 1 Co 12:28.

of comforting and instructing the members are in the foreground, with admonition, reproof and discipline mentioned afterward.[285]

The Election of Office Bearers

The ambivalent view that Calvin had of the congregation in regard to the election of office bearers has had an impact on Reformed churches. He regarded the involvement of the congregation in the election process as important. But he also had reservations in regard to the spiritual discernment of the congregation and therefore limited the congregational involvement.[286]

Calvin's concern about the capacity of the congregation to discern was reflected in the Council of Wesel (1568). There, reservations were expressed about the ability of the congregations to choose their own ministers, as well as concerning possible tyranny by office bearers. This council proposed allowing the elders to decide, followed by general consent from the congregation. However, it was thought that after becoming organized as a federation of churches, an ecclesiastical assembly of ministers and elders would be sufficient without requiring the assent of the people. Pending such a development, it was decided that the elders could propose two names to the congregation, from which one could be elected.[287]

Various churches in the Netherlands refrained from sending delegates to the subsequent Synod of Emden in 1571, fearing a new form of hierarchy. Those that did attend the Synod did not ignore the sensitivities of such churches, stressing that the Church Order that was being developed was to serve the benefit of the churches and that

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[285] *Book of Praise*, 630.

[286] Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt*, 86-87.

[287] J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink, et al., eds., *Documenta Reformatoria: Teksten uit de geschiedenis van kerk en theologie in de Nederlanden sedert de Hervorming*, Deel I: Tot het einde van de 17de eeuw (Kampen: J.H. Kok, N.V., 1960), 183-184.

changes could be made. They wished to avoid excessive independence. While explicitly rejecting hierarchy, they did form a federation of churches with regional and general assemblies.[288]

At the Synod of Emden (1571), consistories were given the authority to elect ministers, elders, and deacons. This change was based on Tit 1:5, 1 Ti 4:14, 5:22. Reference was also made to Tertullian and Cyprian. But there was also the fear that if things were left up to the congregation, the multitude of voices could open the door for an "innumerable host of wolves, disorderliness and divisions" because the majority of the people was "generally corrupt, blind, and unwise."[289] The names of those chosen would be announced to the congregation to give the opportunity for possible objections. Silence would be interpreted as agreement. In regard to the election of ministers, not only the local congregation, but also classis would have to approve of the choice.[290]

The church order adopted at the Synod of Emden in 1571 was very important for the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, as can be seen by comparing it with the one adopted by the Synod of Dort, which was held from 1618-1619. There is a great deal of continuity, although changes were made because of different circumstances.[291]

The system of church government as advocated by Calvin continues to be the characteristic of the Canadian Reformed Churches as well. The Church Order of this federation of churches is not identical in all respects to the Church Order formulated by the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), but many similarities can be pointed out. A number of items are worth observing in particular. The congregation is involved in the election of

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[288] Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt*, 100.
[289] Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt*, 98-99, cf. pp. 94-95.
[290] Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt*, 101.
[291] Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt*, 101.

office bearers and the approbation of the results of the election (Article 3). However, the consistory (i.e. elders) with the deacons plays a leading role in the process and is responsible for the appointment of those who are elected to a particular office. The description of the tasks of the ministers of the Word (Article 16) and missionaries (Article 18), as well as elders (Article 22) and deacons (Article 23) also show strong influences of Calvin's thinking.

It is interesting to note that in the discussion of the church order adopted by the Synod of Dort, having the consistory elect office bearers was defended by referring to the fact that Christ gave office bearers the authority to lead the flock. This should therefore not simply be left up to the people to decide.[292] In subsequent history, Reformed churches have given the congregation the right to submit nominations to the consistory as well as the right to elect her own office bearers. The consistory with the deacons, however, retains the responsibility for overseeing the process and for appointing those chosen to their respective offices.[293]

Elders and Home Visits

We have sought to enrich our understanding of what the Bible says about the biblical offices, in particular the office of elder. We have examined various insights of Bucer and Calvin that are either already reflected in or could enrich the Canadian Reformed understanding of office, in particular the office of elder and how it is to function. Many practical aspects have been touched on in the process. The time has now come to focus more specifically on the pastoral work they do by visiting church members

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[292] Graafland, *Gedachten over het ambt*, 102.

[293] See Article 3 of the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the *Book of Praise*, 655-666.

in their homes. This is something that both Bucer and Calvin emphasized as being a key in promoting the spiritual development of the church.

Informal contacts are an important means for getting to know the congregation members and for attending to their needs. However, in order to ensure that the work of oversight takes place in a systematic way, elders in the Canadian Reformed Churches schedule annual home visits with the members. Then elders form teams of two while visiting members to discuss matters pertaining to doctrine and life. Where they observe problems that need special attention, subsequent visits may be made together or individually, depending on the situation.

The annual home visits form the backbone of pastoral care in building up the life of members of the Canadian Reformed Churches. The Word is brought home to individuals and families in personal conversations, where the elders seek to ascertain what lives among them and how to help the members to function individually and together as members of the local body of Christ and as citizens of the Kingdom of God in this world. This study would therefore not be complete without a brief overview of various publications and their themes in regard to the work of elders during annual home visits.

A number of significant publications on the work of elders have appeared in the Dutch and English languages during the 20th century and in the first decade of the 21st century. They do not all cover the same topics. Surveying the literature, one can see various themes emerge. Some authors approach the matter more systematically, including background information from Scripture and church history on the matter of elders and

home visits before providing practical guidelines.[294] Others devote their attention

primarily to biblical principles and practical issues.[295] There is variety in the topics dealt

with, the order in which they are presented, and in the amount of detail. Undoubtedly

personal preferences and interests of the authors played a role. However, the time in

which certain books were written as well as the audience being addressed are also factors.

Various themes that are touched on in the literature can be grouped together and

summarized as follows. The list is not exhaustive: the biblical background of the office of

elders, the name and nature of family visitation, Scripture on caring for individuals, the

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[294] See, for example, P. Biesterveld, *Het Huisbezoek*, third ed. revised by T. Hoekstra (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1923); Peter Y. De Jong, *Taking Heed to the Flock: A Study of the Principles and Practice of Family Visitation* (1948; repr., Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003). De Jong expresses his indebtedness to the book on home visits written by P. Biesterveld. Those who are unable to read Dutch will find many of Biesterveld's insights summarized in De Jong's book. Another less extensive but useful publication has been written by Peter G. Feenstra, *The Glorious Work of Home Visits* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Premier Publishing, 2000). It touches on the history of home visiting, but focuses primarily on practical aspects. Along similar lines is a book put together by W. Huizinga, ed., *From House to House: Articles and helps for beginning elders*, The Reformed Guardian: New Series, no. 19 (Australia: No publisher mentioned, 2004). Renkema-Hoffman provides a useful summary of the historical development of the Reformed system of ecclesiastical offices in from the early church until today in *Naar een nieuwe kerkeraad*, 30-56. Her work is not primarily focused on home visits but culminates in a proposal to organize the pastoral work of the elders and deacons in a way that does justice to the specific nature of their work, delegating other activities as much as possible to other congregation members. See especially pp. 76-81. See also *The Elder: Today's Ministry Rooted in all of Scripture*, by C. Van Dam. He devotes considerable attention to the Old Testament background of eldership.

[295] Aside from various books already mentioned so far, some publications from a Reformed perspective in the English language during the last decades are, for example, Lawrence R. Eyres, *The Elders of the Church* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1975); Gerard Berghoef and Lester De Koster, *The Elder's Handbook: A practical guide for church leaders* (Grand, Rapids, Mich: Christian's Library Press, 1979); John R. Sittema, *With a Shepherd's Heart: Reclaiming the Pastoral Office of Elder* (Grandville, Michigan: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1996); Louis M. Tamminga, *Guiding God's People in a Changing World: A Handbook for Elders* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1998); Gerrit Riemer, *The Living Congregation*, translated by Roland Zuidema (Zwolle, The Netherlands: IRTT, 2000); David Dickson, edited by George Kennedy McFarland and Philip Graham Ryken, *The Elder and his Work* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P & R Publishing, 2004); and Michael Brown, ed., *Called to Serve: Essays for Elders and Deacons* (Grandville, Michigan: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 2006). Other useful resources in the Dutch language are: W.A. Wiersinga, *Weid en waak: Practische leidraad voor de ouderling* (Wageningen: Gebr. Zomer & Keunings, 1952); A. N. Hendriks, *Als huisverzonger Gods: handreiking aan de ouderling* ([S.l.]: De Vuurbaak, 1972); W. Meijer, *Vanavond huisbezoek*, 2e druk (Groningen: Uitgeverij De Vuurbaak bv, 1975); C. Trimp, *Zorgen voor de gemeente: Het ambtelijke werk van ouderlingen en diakenen toegelicht* (Kampen: Copieerinrichting v.d. Berg, 1982); D. Koole and W.H. Velema, editors, *Uit liefde tot Christus en zijn gemeente: Een handreiking aan de ouderling* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J.H. Kok, 1982); and D. Koole and W.H. Velema, editors, *Verricht uw dienst ten volle: Een handreiking aan de ouderling* (Kampen: Kok, 1985).

history of home visits, the social context, the character and purpose of home visits, the necessity of such visits, objections to such visits, the value of such visits, who should pay the visits, their qualifications, personal preparation, whom to visit, when and how often, an evaluation of shifts and trends in regard to visits, alternative forms for visits, and an evaluation of alternatives.

Discussions on the structure of home visits include attention for such topics as prayer in the home visits, and conducting a conversation.[296] A wide array of topics are mentioned in various publications, including prominent items such as discussing the preaching and the sacraments, self-examination, a member's relationship with God, prayer and Bible reading, instruction at home, what is being read in the home, and relationships in the home, church and society. Instructions are also given as to how to deal with various kinds of personal difficulties that may be brought up by the people being visited. Finally, there are tips as to how to close the home visit.

While focusing on various topics that arise during home visits, elders may need to interact with errors in doctrine or counsel and admonish members in connection with certain sins. Where members persistently reject biblical instruction and/or admonition, further visits take place in the context of church discipline. Following the visits, the elders who paid the visit also need to discuss the question of what to report to the body of elders.

Aside from formal visits, the importance of showing continuing interest in the members who were visited is stressed in various ways. Some form of record-keeping can be of help in remembering what needs further attention, although given privacy issues,

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[296] For a detailed work devoted to "spiritual conversation" from a Reformed perspective, see J.A. Knepper, *Wholesome Communication: A Guide to Spiritual Conversation*, translated by Theodore Plantinga (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1990).

discretion must be exercised in what is written down and how long such records are kept. Follow-up can consist of another visit, but may also take the form of phone calls, written notes, or casual conversation when meeting members after church or at other occasions.

Special themes in various books include how to visit young people, single people, the elderly, people married to unbelievers, people who try to undermine the purpose of a home visit and how to deal with marital difficulties. In a more recent book, Louis M. Tamminga has devoted special attention to such topics as ministry to the disabled, abuse victims and perpetrators, homosexual members, the dying, the bereaved, and the suicidal.[297]

Another topic related to the work of the elders in regard to home visits is that of overseeing the preaching, since during home visits elders also focus on whether or not the preaching is edifying for the members. In various books, attention is also given to the family of the elder.

The Purpose of Home Visits

Devoting detailed attention to what has been written about each of the topics in the publications mentioned above would lead well beyond the scope of this project. Essentially it could amount to writing another manual for elders. While that can be useful, its scope would differ from the purpose of this dissertation. Before moving on to the more practical section of this dissertation, however, the question of the purpose of the elders as they visit congregation members does merit attention as a special topic. After all, it serves as a point of integration for all the various activities of the office bearers.

Having a clear view of the purpose of the work of elders will give them and congregation members a sense of focus and direction in the many conversations that take

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[297] Tamminga, *Guiding God's People in a Changing World,* 56-68.

place among them. It will also help the elders to assess their work individually and together as consistory, when they gather to discuss matters pertaining to the spiritual life of the congregation over which they are called to have oversight.

The Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons does not give much direction concerning the purpose of visiting members in their homes beyond the general guideline that it is "to comfort, instruct, and admonish them with the Word of God, reproving those who behave improperly." It also notes, "They shall exercise Christian discipline, according to the command of Christ, against those who show themselves unbelieving and ungodly and refuse to repent."[298] As highlighted earlier, the elements of comforting and instructing the members are in the foreground. The focal points for attention are doctrine and life.

It would take too much space to summarize the entire field of publications in regard to the purpose of the work of elders, especially in regard to their pastoral task. However, some themes are worth highlighting. They can serve to give an impression of various aspects that should be considered in connection with this important work.

C. Vonk indicates that elders should not only instruct members about the promise of the covenant, but also investigate whether they are living according to the demands of the covenant. In this regard, the ten words of the covenant occupy a prominent place as the rule for the lives of Christians. In writing on the work of elders, he devotes a separate volume to this theme.[299]

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[298] *Book of Praise*, 630. See also Article 22 of the Church Order on page 663, which highlights the same elements.

[299] C. Vonk, *Huisbezoek naar Gods geboden* (Kampen:ca. mid-20th Century). On pp. 213-215 he stresses that elders must look for the fruit of the Word, investigating whether or not the congregation members are truly living as children of the kingdom according to the law of the Lord (1 Co 6:10; Rev 21:27; 22:15).

A.N. Hendriks criticizes Vonk's approach as being one-sided in emphasizing the work of elders in terms of the office of king. Pointing to K. Dijk, he explains that there should also be prophetic application, priestly compassion, and loving pastoral care. Accordingly, he firmly rejects the idea of a home visit as a "visitation" that amounts to an inspection, although he acknowledges that probing questions can be asked. What should be central is the desire to function compassionately as shepherd of the sheep.[300]

Hendriks outlines three responsibilities of elders in his book. He stresses first of all giving pastoral care to the congregation. This includes exercising oversight over the members and guiding them as shepherds (Ac 20:28; 1 Pe 2:25; 5:2), also admonishing them when necessary (Tit 1:9; Ac 20:31; 1 Th 5:12,14), and giving instruction (Heb 13:17; 1 Ti 3:2). Secondly, he notes the importance of ruling the congregation (1 Ti 3:4-5; 1 Th 5:12; cf. 1 Ti 5:17) as "stewards of the house of God" (Tit 1:7). Thirdly, pointing to Paul's warning against wolves (Ac 20:28,31), he lists the need for elders to exercise oversight over the doctrine of the church. People who oppose sound doctrine should be refuted (Tit 1:9-11).[301]

According to Hendriks, the purpose of home visits is "the edification of the congregation members" individually and together as a body (Ro 15:2; 1 Co 8:1; 14:3,5,12,26; 2 Co 10:8; 12:19), remaining in Christ and living out of him, living by the Spirit, understanding their calling as communion of saints, being active in mission work, supporting the preaching in prayer and financially, and doing good works that are visible

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[300] A.N. Hendriks, *Als huisverzorger Gods: handreiking aan de ouderling* (Groningen: De Vuurbaak, 1972), 25-26.

[301] Hendriks, *Als huisverzorger Gods,* 12-14.

for everyone.[302] His effort to broaden the purpose of home visits to include directing the focus of members toward people outside the church community is to be appreciated.

Nelson D. Kloosterman has published a video recording of a "Church Leadership Training Course" for elders and deacons. In this lecture series, he explains the work of elders from Scripture in terms of the elder as shepherd, watchman, and overseer, while explaining the work of deacons as stewards. In the fourth session of the lecture series, he defines the purpose of visiting as "an official means of concretely applying God's Word to the lives of congregation members under our care."[303] Kloosterman does not explore the theme of elders as "stewards of the house of God." This is a theme brought forward in the Canadian Reformed "Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons" after an explanation of the work of elders as "bishops or overseers as well as shepherds and guardians."[304]

Tamminga attempts to sketch a broader perspective, speaking of "A Spiritual Vision for the Church." He explains that office bearers together with all believers share in the calling to the ministry of reconciliation as expressed by the apostle Paul in 2 Co 5:20. He goes on to state that this includes "reconciliation with God and with each other," and describes this ministry as "the foundation of your congregation's ministry."[305]

It is true that reconciliation with God and with one another is an essential part of the preaching ministry of the church. However, the question is whether this theme of reconciliation is adequate for defining the work of the elders and of the congregation. Tamminga seems to sense the inadequacy of using "reconciliation" as the defining

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[302] Hendriks, *Als huisverzorger Gods*, 27-28.

[303] Nelson D. Kloosterman, *Visiting Members* (ten-session DVD seminar for Church Leadership Training of Elders and Deacons).

[304] *Book of Praise*, 629-630; cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.iii.6.

[305] Tamminga, *Guiding God's People in a Changing World*, 29.

concept for the purpose of the work of the elders, for he goes on to focus on to speak of a "dual covenantal vision" that should characterize the service of elders: the relationship of the members to God and to each other. This goes beyond reconciliation to cover the dynamic of nurturing the spiritual life of the members with God and with one another in a covenantal community that is characterized by love: "mutual caregiving and care-receiving."[306] Further on in his book, he indicates that "Basically the purpose is to encourage, strengthen, and affirm family members in their personal faith (Eph. 3:14-21; 4:11-16)."[307] Accordingly, he encourages elders to "focus on the relationship of this family to the Lord and how that works out in their daily lives."[308]

Tamminga points out that many members "have two basic concerns: how to experience and live out their salvation, and how to deal with nagging doubt and failure." He then highlights the link in the New Testament between salvation by grace through faith in Christ and "godliness" (*eusebia*). As explained in Lord's Day 32 of the Heidelberg Catechism, good works are the fruit of salvation, but also function to give greater certainty of salvation and serve to win others for Christ. This provides "a firm biblical foundation and perspective" for what he calls "spiritual formation."[309]

Tamminga also touches on the need to focus on the relationship between congregation members and the world. Echoing Scripture, he points to their calling to be *"in the world,* but not *of the world. "* That is a challenge, for "society affects your people in at least two ways: it entices them with material rewards, and it frightens them with

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[306] Tamminga, *Guiding God's People in a Changing World,* 36.

[307] Tamminga, *Guiding God's People in a Changing World,* 44. See also p. 75, where he describes the work of elders and deacons together in council as working toward "on goal: that the body of believers grows both in faith and in number."

[308] Tamminga, *Guiding God's People in a Changing World,* 47.

[309] Tamminga, *Guiding God's People in a Changing World,* 38-39.

omens of evil and doom." He then outlines challenges that elders face in their ministry: members must be called to be "prophetically faithful," exhibiting a holy, faithful lifestyle and "calling the ruling authorities to champion goodness, decency, and righteousness." "Secondly," he writes, "the church must focus on the ministry of consolation and mercy." As he puts it, "the local church's ministry has a dual focus: the well-being of its members as well as outreach to the world." It seems, however, that in this vision, the emphasis lies less on the proclamation of the gospel in the world and more on a generalized "practice of mercy and the kingdom pursuit of justice."[310]

Jay E. Adams speaks of "guiding" and "protecting" the sheep as two key tasks of those who are called to be "shepherd-teachers" of the church (Eph 4:11).[311] Using the imagery of the rod and the staff of the shepherd, he stresses the importance of biblical teaching and admonition in caring for the flock. He also speaks of "the elder's ruling, managing function" next to "feeding," i.e. teaching. In all this, "exercising oversight" continues to be a central component of the work of a shepherd, with emphasis also on the necessity of guarding themselves and the sheep from danger.[312]

Gerrit Riemer similarly emphasizes the role of the elder as a shepherd who cares for his sheep. This not only includes themes associated with guiding the flock, but also discipline. Next to this, there is the task of protecting the sheep from various dangers.[313] He also explores the image of the elder as steward in the house of God.[314] In regard to the purpose of the work of elders, he points to the broader framework in which they function,

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[310] Tamminga, *Guiding God's People in a Changing World*, 42-43.

[311] Jay E. Adams, *The Use of the Rod and the Staff: A Neglected Aspect of Shepherding* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2003), 3-5.

[312] Adams, *The Use of the Rod and the Staff*, 56-60.

[313] Riemer, *The Living Congregation*, 142-171.

[314] Riemer, *The Living Congregation*, 173-185.

namely that of "building God's house here on earth." He links this to the task of the church to stand up for the truth in this world as well as to be prepared for the second coming of Jesus Christ, the bridegroom of the church.[315]

P.G. Feenstra links the preaching of the Word on Sundays directly with the task of elders in visiting the homes. "The general care of the congregation in the preaching is individualized in a home visit. It brings 'home' the message of the pulpit. It seeks to understand how members of the congregation put into practice the message preached."[316] Although it is good to ask how the members are working with the preaching, one wonders if formulating that as the central thrust of the home visit is not too restrictive.

The scope broadens when Feenstra goes on to describe the purpose of home visits as undergirding "the purpose of our life: to glorify the Lord by loving him with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbour as ourselves (Dt 6:4,5; Matt 22:37-40)." The means to accomplish this are encouragement and admonition with a view to living for the Lord and seeking to "build each other up in faith, love and holiness." He also sees home visits as providing "the opportunity to develop good Christian communication."[317]

It is good to keep in mind the context of home visits. They are not simply a matter of pastoral care given to individual members. The ultimate goal includes building up the members together as body of Christ, enabling them to grow spiritually and function well together. This calls for a broader perspective, involving the development of the congregation as a whole, equipping members for their task in this world. Accordingly, I would like to define the *purpose* of the work of elders as follows: To equip the saints as citizens of the kingdom of God individually and corporately for works of service, seeking

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[315] Riemer, *The Living Congregation,* 13, 17.
[316] Feenstra, *The Glorious Work of Home Visits,* 3.
[317] Feenstra, *The Glorious Work of Home Visits,* 4.

to build them up to live to the praise of their covenant God in the church and the world according to their calling as Christians who have been united by the Holy Spirit with Jesus Christ, their Saviour and King.

The expression "to equip the saints … for works of service" is taken from Eph 4:11. "Equipping" includes the concepts of training and discipline.[318] Members of the church are "saints," people who have been called by God to be holy, separated from this world and dedicated to serving him. The salvation of sinners is not a goal in itself. Sinners are saved to glorify God through service. Office bearers have been given by Christ to the church to give the members focused pastoral attention to help them fulfill their calling.

The concept of Christians being citizens of the kingdom of God is expressed in various ways in the New Testament (see, for example: Eph 2:19; Php 3:20). The kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven is a "heavenly" future reality. However, it is also present in principle now (cf. Mt 12:28; 16:19) and it encompasses more than only the church.[319] The reference to the saints being equipped as "citizens of the kingdom of God" reminds us that works of service are not restricted to the church, but take place in a world in which Christians recognize that Jesus Christ already rules as King and wishes to be honoured as such.

The ascended Christ gives office bearers to equip God's people "for works of service" (Eph 4:12). Such works must be done for others according to a certain standard. The Heidelberg Catechism outlines the nature and scope of what constitutes such good

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[318] Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. καταρτισμός.

[319] As J. Van Genderen puts it: "In the New Testament, the church stands in the light of the kingdom of God that has come and will come. She lives from the gifts of God's kingdom and expects the coming of that kingdom in glory." In J. Van Genderen and J.H. Velema, *Beknopte Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 1993), 622.

works: "only those which are done out of true faith, in accordance with the law of God, and to His glory."[320] The focal point of this work of service is the church, but it involves equipping the church to fulfill a mission in the world.

Elders are to do their work purposefully as shepherds, guardians and stewards, using the Word of God as the instrument for tending the members entrusted to their care. They are to work in an orderly way as shepherds of the flock, seeking the lost, bringing back those who stray, tending to the needs of the weak and wounded, and strengthening further those who are healthy. Elders are to listen carefully so that they will be able to bring the Word in an appropriate way, speaking with prophetic clarity to equip the members to live out of Christ and for Christ as citizens of the kingdom of God in this world. At the same time elders are to approach the members with priestly compassion and with the boldness of men who have been given a special calling to govern the church as servants of Christ, the King. They are therefore also to exercise discipline to correct those who do not repent and to protect the flock against wolves. If necessary, they are to make use of their God-given authority to exclude unrepentant sinners from the communion of the church.

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[320] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 91 in *Book of Praise*, 512.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Keeping in mind the Reformed understanding of eldership, it is time to address

the matter of how the office is functioning in practice in the Canadian Reformed

Churches in the province of Manitoba. Are the elders and the church members they deal

with satisfied that this office is functioning in a scriptural and upbuilding way?

Surveys

In order to understand various practical challenges as seen from the perspective of

congregation members and elders in their interaction with each other, I designed two

surveys to collect data. Many questions were put in a multiple-choice format to make it

possible to assess their results statistically. Other questions gave the respondents the

opportunity to offer detailed responses, including their opinions and suggestions.

Given the fact that surveys can be notorious for ambiguous questions, I presented

some elders and communicant members of the churches with the surveys in a draft form

for feedback to enhance clarity, and to ensure that the feedback on a larger scale will be

usable. After some revisions, the surveys were finalized and distributed among two rural

and two city congregations in Manitoba.

The purpose of these surveys was to gain some insight in the spiritual well-being

of the members and to establish how elders can contribute to their development. The

results form the basis for drawing conclusions as to what areas in the life of the

congregation as a whole and of the members individually need special attention. They

also serve to provide suggestions as to how to improve the functioning of the office of elder.

One of the two surveys was designed for "Individual Communicant Members" (see Appendix One).[321] The structure of this survey reflects a number of underlying convictions. The church is the communion of saints.[322] This implies first of all communion with Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus Christ opens the way to fellowship with the triune God. Secondly, members also have communion with each other. For this reason, during their conversations with those whom they visit, elders do well to ascertain how the bond of the members is with Jesus Christ as well as how committed they are to the local body of Christ.

As Christians, congregation members are united with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The Heidelberg Catechism notes that through their union with Christ, who is prophet, priest and king, they share in his anointing. They have a prophetic, priestly and kingly task in the world.[323] For this reason, the survey contains questions relating to these aspects of the Christian life.

Including personal questions about age, gender, etc., in a survey makes it possible to look for correlations between such information and, for example, how well people feel

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[321] In the Canadian Reformed Churches, baptized members are distinguished from communicant members. Baptized members are usually children and young adults. Infant baptism is practised on the basis of the conviction that baptism is a sign and seal of God's covenant promises, which are for believers and for their children (cf. Ge 17:7; Ps 22:10; Is 44:1-3; Mt 19:14; Ac 2:38,39; 16:31. For a fuller explanation of grounds for infant baptism, see Q&A 74 of the Heidelberg Catechism in *Book of Praise*, 503.)

Young people in the Canadian Reformed Churches generally receive weekly catechetical instruction between September and April from the time they are about 12 until they are about 18 years old. After this period of instruction, most of them indicate the desire to make public profession of their faith. On the basis of a positive outcome of an examination of their life and conduct, they are entitled to make public profession of their faith and thereby receive the right to participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. They are then known as communicant members. Unbelievers who come to the faith and have not yet been baptized are first instructed and upon making public profession of faith are then baptized as adults and at the same time receive the status of becoming communicant members.

[322] The Heidelberg Catechism focuses on this in Question and Answer 55. See the *Book of Praise*, 495.

[323] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 32, in *Book of Praise*, 486.

connected in a particular congregation or how well they are connecting with elders during visits. Asking if a communicant member has ever served as an elder or is in the family of an elder is also significant, since this can have an impact on how men currently serving as an elder interact with that individual.

The "Survey of Elders" (see Appendix Two) is designed to establish what the elders have found helpful in their preparation for office. Furthermore, it serves to shed light on which challenges they face and in which ways they need help in fulfilling the obligations of their office. Typically their theoretical preparation involves going through materials that explain their task in writing or in an audio-visual format. In practice, the abilities of a beginning elder are usually developed through working together with another elder who has more experience, since annual home visits are made by teams of two elders. The survey seeks to discern benefits of this team approach. Further, various questions are asked to ascertain how the annual home visits take place and how further contact is maintained. The closing questions are meant to pinpoint problem areas as seen by the elders and to solicit suggestions as to how they can be helped further in fulfilling their tasks.

Data Collection

In order to keep the quantity of information manageable, these surveys were only done among elders and communicant members of four Canadian Reformed Churches in Manitoba. There are two rural churches located in Carman, and two churches in the city of Winnipeg. Choosing these four churches gave the opportunity to compare data and to observe similarities and differences between them.

Below is a table containing some statistical information gathered at the end of 2007 regarding the number of church members and office bearers in each of these four churches.[324] In regard to the numbers in table 1, it should be noted that the total membership includes baptized members (children and young adults) as well as communicant members. As explained in a footnote earlier, "communicant" refers to a sub-group in the congregations: those who have been baptized and who have also made public profession of faith, thereby receiving access to the celebration of the Lord's Supper unless they are under church discipline.

The four churches listed in table 1 have a total of 1,355 members, of which 719 are communicant members. That is the group I decided to devote special attention to.

Table 1. Membership data and number of office bearers

Churches	Membership Total	-	Communicant	Minister	Elders	Deacons
Carman East	356	-	197	1	7	4
Carman West	387	-	181	1	8	4
Winnipeg - Grace	248	-	149	-	6	4
Winnipeg - Redeemer	364	-	192	1	8	4
OVERALL TOTAL	1,355	-	719	3	29	16

Of approximately 720 surveys given to individual communicant members of the above-mentioned churches, 269 were received in return. That is more than one in three, which is good considering the fact that completion of these surveys was voluntary and anonymous. The response rate is an indicator of the significant interest which members have in the topic. The "Survey of Elders" was passed on to all of the 29 elders; 26 responded.

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[324] J. Visscher, ed., *Yearbook: Anno Domini 2008 - Canadian and American Reformed Churches & The Free Reformed Churches of Australia* (Winnipeg: Premier Printing Ltd., 2008), 40,43,163,166.

Not all who received a survey had the time or desire to participate, although their input could be significant.[325] People who lack motivation to complete the survey may actually have important things to say, but may have either given up hope of seeing how the elders could help them or not have any desire to have the elders interact with them on a meaningful spiritual level. This is not a problem that can easily be addressed within the scope of this dissertation. However, information from those who do respond to the surveys can in some cases help alleviate such an issue if elders take the results seriously. Some honest constructive criticism is better than none at all.

Confidentiality

The relatively large number of those who responded to the surveys indicates a high level of interest on their part in the work of elders. Evidently they were convinced that their thoughts would be taken seriously and used in a constructive way. Informing them that their answers would be used in conjunction with what others bring forward undoubtedly helped many to be open, since this gives some assurance of anonymity.

When requesting people to fill in a survey, it is important to ensure that confidentiality is maintained in regard to data collection. Since I could not collect the results from all the respondents personally, I requested that the results be placed in a sealed envelope and given to the clerk of the consistory of each church. As office bearers, they would also understand the need for maintaining privacy.

To ensure confidentiality, safeguards had to be in place for reporting the data. For this reason, a multiple choice format was chosen for the majority of the questions. This

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[325] I did not fill in a survey myself since I did not want to insert a hidden influence in the data which was collected.

made it possible to tabulate the responses statistically in the next chapter in such a way that particular individuals cannot be identified.

Answers given to qualitative type questions exhibit a more personal character. So caution was exercised as to how such responses were linked to other data. Where there might be a concern that the way someone wrote could make it easier to identify the individual, I offer a summary of various responses or only brief quotations. Ultimately, the goal is to use such responses as a platform for specific recommendations.

Since the surveys were collected in separate boxes in each church building, it was a simple matter to sort the results according to which church the respondents belong to. In this way it is possible to establish whether there are significant differences between the rural and city congregations. When the results of the surveys are reported in subsequent tables, reference will not be made to specific churches. The abbreviations "R1" and "R2" will be used to refer to the two rural congregations, while "C1" and "C2" will refer to the two city congregations.

Despite the assurance of anonymity that was given, some respondents evidently still had privacy concerns and chose not to give certain answers that could indicated to a degree which group they belonged to (e.g.: immigrant or not, age bracket, etc.). This is reflected in tables where the number of respondents varies according to which questions were posed.

Data Analysis

Using the multiple choice question format make it possible to use statistics when assessing the responses. However, a technical difficulty arose as to what to do with a number of questions where respondents circled more than one option even when this was

not explicitly called for. In the "Survey of Individual Communicant Members" the possibility of circling more than one item was deliberately solicited in questions 6 and 30. However, in response to questions 7, 21, 23, 28, 29 and 30, some respondents either circled more than one item or offered another response. Should such unsolicited "extra" responses simply be discarded as invalid, or should an attempt be made to give the reader an impression of what happened?

Technically it would be possible to disregard any responses that fall outside of the parameters of the questions and possible responses as solicited by the surveys. This would, however, not give an accurate impression of the results. It would also place significant limits on fully observing, interpreting and reporting the scope of the responses.

It can be argued that for the purpose of statistics it is not correct to take into account options not explicitly offered on the questionnaire. If all respondents had envisioned the possibility of circling more than one answer to a given question, more could have chosen to do so. This is a relevant point and it should be kept in mind when weighing the value of the responses to certain questions which will be referred to below.

Where unsolicited responses were offered, they are included in the report. However, it is still possible on the basis of the information given to take a "stricter" approach to the data. A reader who wishes to do so can mentally bracket any extra category that has been introduced to represent unsolicited responses to the questions and still see which ones technically do correspond to the intent of the survey.

In regard to question 6 of the "Survey of Individual Communicant Members," where the opportunity was deliberately given to circle more than one answer, I chose to

tabulate such multiple responses as "5" meaning "Other," i.e. another answer which could include a combination of the above. In cases where "extra" answers were not anticipated but were given anyway, the resulting further variables are described in the tables to indicate what happened and to make it possible to weigh the responses as evenly and completely as possible. For example, the assumption behind question 7 ("How often do you usually go to church?") was that people would opt either for "Twice each Sunday" or "Once each Sunday" depending on what their basic pattern of church attendance was. Some respondents, however, circled both "twice each Sunday" and "once." The explanation was that the spouses alternate because of taking turns babysitting a child who is taking a nap at that time. Here it was a simple matter to introduce a fifth category: "Once or twice each Sunday" and use that to account for such answers. That seems to be a better approach than indicating that those answers were invalid and thereby skew the picture of what is actually happening on Sundays.

The numbered responses to question 21 ("If you have a child or children at home, do you find that the elders succeed in getting him/her/them to talk about their walk with God?") apparently did not offer some members enough flexibility. As one respondent put it, "the results in my home vary from 1-4 depending on the child and the 'skill' of an elder." To represent such an answer in a table I added a variable to the list: "It depends..." Again, that seems to be a better approach than indicating that such answers are invalid or not reporting such answers at all.

Question 23 ("You find that during the annual home visit elders usually talk: 1. Enough 2. Not enough 3. Too much) also gave many people reason to circle all three. This is represented by the added variable 4, "It depends on the elder."

When asked "What do you find the easiest way to communicate with an elder," (question 28), four responded by choosing a combination of "1. Face-to-face" and "4. By e-mail." This was not one of the options listed, but it is represented in the table by a sixth variable "Face-to-face and by e-mail" to represent their response. Otherwise, their responses would have to be tabulated as being "blank," which they were not, or "invalid," which although technically true would neither do justice to their position nor adequately represent it.

It is clear from the responses to question 29 that elders do not enjoy the complete trust of all congregation members that they will keep things confidential (unless they are under obligation to disclose certain facts). From responses, it was evident that a simple "yes" or "no" was not entirely adequate. Seven members expressed hesitation at giving either a "yes" or "no" answer, indicating that their response would be influenced by who the elder is. This prompted me to add a third variable to the list: "It depends on who the elder is," to account for such responses, since they clearly went beyond a "no response" pattern.

Question 30 ("Which problems would you probably feel free to share with an elder?") requested respondents to "circle all that apply." As could be expected, circling one, two, or all three options leads to various combinations. To represent this statistically, variables had to be formulated beyond the first three in order to be able to indicate which items were circled in response to the question. Some respondents also offered additional written answers which are represented in a table as variables 8 and 9. This led to the following combinations:

4 = Physical, mental, or emotional problems.
5 = Physical or spiritual problems.

6 = Mental, emotional or spiritual problems.
7 = Physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual problems.
8 = Which problems I share would depend on the elder.
9 = I would not feel free to share such problems with an elder.

In the "Survey of Elders," the possibility of circling more than one item in response to a question was explicitly offered in questions 7 and 13. However, various elders also circled more than one item in response to questions 2 and 15. Apparently they felt too restricted by being requested to circle only one option. This is reflected in the tables presenting the data.

The Composition of the Tables

As indicated already, 269 surveys were returned, which is a response rate of better than 30% of the surveys submitted to the communicant members. Not all members, however, responded to each question, presumably to enhance the anonymity of their answers. This is why there is some fluctuation where the number of respondents ("N" values) are indicated in the tables presented in the next chapter.

Each table is preceded by an explanation of which information is being given either in a row or in a column. A *row* in each table consists of the information on a line from left to right. In the tables where the final *column* on the right has the letter "N" at the top, the number at the end of each row provides the sum of the number of respondents represented in the row. The sum total of the number of respondents represented in the entire table can be found at the bottom of the column. The second last column in most of the tables has the heading "Total %" and consists of percentages which correspond to the numerical values in the "N" column immediately to the right. They are the percentages of the total "N" value which can be found in the bottom right hand corner of each table.

The numbers above each column containing a sum total of 100% are percentages of the number of respondents listed below them. I present them as column percentages since individual numbers are hard to compare when the total number of respondents in each column differ. The exact number represented by a particular percentage in those columns can be calculated by multiplying the number of respondents at the bottom of the relevant column by the percentage in the column above that number.

Some of the tables present the information gathered from the surveys in terms of numbers of respondents rather than as percentages. This approach was generally taken where numbers were very low and where using percentages would be less clear.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The ultimate goal of this dissertation is to provide information that can be used to equip the elders further for the task of shepherding the church of God (Ac 20:28). They have the task of preparing God's people: "for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph 4:12). When the members of the body of Christ are built up, they will be in a better position to fulfill their calling with respect to the Lord, to each other, and with respect to people around them in the world. If unbelievers are reached in this way and become church members, the body of Christ will be built up even further.

How can elders be equipped to give effective spiritual leadership in a way relevant to the needs of the church members individually and to the church as a whole? It is not enough to instruct them regarding what Scripture says about eldership and what the qualifications for being an elder are. It is essential to understand what challenges they face not only seen from their perspective but also from the perspective of the congregation that they are serving. We therefore pinpoint areas requiring attention of the office bearers using input derived from communicant members and elders among them in two rural and two city congregations.

This chapter presents an assessment of the results of "A Survey of Individual Communicant Members"[326] and "A Survey of Elders."[327] It offers only a snapshot of what members and office bearers have brought forward at a particular point in time. The

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[326] See Appendix One of this dissertation.
[327] See Appendix Two of this dissertation.

dynamics of a congregation can change as people leave and others join. Dynamics are also influenced annually as some elders come to the end of their term of office and are replaced by others. However, certain fundamental principles do come to light in these surveys and elders should keep them in mind in the course of their work.

This Fourth Chapter does not offer an exhaustive overview of the results of the surveys. It focuses on various highlights that may be particularly useful for the consistories of the participating churches. It is up to them to decide how to work with the data and the accompanying recommendations. The findings should also lend themselves well as a resource for preparing a manual or a series of presentations for future conferences to which aspiring elders as well as those who are already serving come for further training and discussion.

Before discussing the various answers provided by the respondents, it is good to note in general who they were and how their responses have been entered into the tables that present the information gathered from them. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the respondents are from two rural churches and two city churches. Accordingly, the two rural churches are referred to as "R1" and "R2," while the two city churches are referred to as "C1" and "C2." Appendix Three of this dissertation presents additional information about the respondents and their background (e.g. their gender, age groups, married or single, etc.). The last section of Chapter Three of this dissertation explains the layout of the tables. Appendix Four contains further statistical data and explanations in connection with Chapter Four for whoever is interested in knowing more details.

We begin with information concerning the spiritual life of the members who responded to the Survey of Individual Communicant Members and how they perceive

themselves in relation to the church they belong to. The material is relevant to the work

of elders, since they raise questions about such matters when visiting members. While

discussing various aspects of the interaction between elders and members, I also draw

information from the responses that elders gave to the Survey of Elders.[328]

Trust in Jesus Christ

The confession that salvation is to be found only in Jesus Christ is expressed

clearly in the Heidelberg Catechism, with which the respondents are familiar. Concerning

"the only Saviour Jesus," the Heidelberg Catechism stresses that "one of two things must

be true: either Jesus is not a complete Saviour, or those who by true faith accept this

Saviour must find in Him all that is necessary for their salvation."[329]

It was gratifying to see that with the exception of eight respondents who did not

give an answer, those who responded to the statement "I trust in Jesus Christ alone for

my salvation," were unanimous in choosing the option: "Yes, this applies to me." Four

members did not complete any of the first six questions of the survey, not realizing that

those were on the back of the letter that introduced the questions.

Justification by faith alone (*sola fide*) is one of the central tenets of the

Reformation. What then is the place of good works? With the few exceptions already

noted, those who responded to the statement "I try to serve God each day according to his

Word because I am thankful for salvation" affirmed: "Yes, this is how I try to live."

There were five exceptions to this out of a total of 261 responses, each of them choosing

the option "sometimes" instead, one in each of the rural congregations and three of the

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[328] See Appendix Two of this dissertation.
[329] *Book of Praise*, 485. See Q&A 30.

respondents in the city congregation C1. Evidently these members are acknowledging that they have significant struggles in living out what they confess to be true.

Bible Reading and Prayer

Reformed churches have long emphasized the pivotal role of Scripture in the life of faith. There are no specifications as to how often the Bible should be read. Many church members often link Bible reading and prayer to mealtimes. Aside from that, 40 of 261 members also read the Bible and pray at other times. It is striking that compared to the two rural congregations (R1 and R2), the two city congregations (C1 and C2) scored significantly lower in terms of the frequency of Bible reading. Especially noteworthy is that approximately 11% of the respondents in congregation C1 acknowledged reading the bible only "now and then and on Sundays."

Table 2. Frequency of reading the Bible or listening to it

How often do you read the Bible or listen to a Bible reading?	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
More than three times a day	26.2	15.3	5.3	13.8	15.3	40
Two or three times a day	65.6	72.9	52.6	58.6	63.6	166
Once a day	8.2	11.8	31.6	24.1	18.0	47
Now and then and on Sundays	0.0	0.0	10.5	3.4	3.1	8
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	85	57	58		261

Many families have the custom of reading the Bible together. Reading together with others is a good custom, but it is not necessarily an indicator of spiritual life for every individual in a family setting. It becomes more significant if a member who does this with others still takes time to do so alone as well. Somewhat more than 30% of those who read the Bible together with others also take time for personal Bible reading. Whatever the case may be, it is worth discussing with the members how to absorb what is being read in a way that is personally edifying.

Table 3. Personal Bible reading

If you live with someone else / others, do you also read the Bible yourself?	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Two or more times a day	1.8	5.0	7.1	7.0	5.2	13
Once a day	28.6	30.0	19.6	24.6	26.1	65
Now and then	57.1	51.3	51.8	52.6	53.0	132
I usually don't read the Bible by myself	10.7	10.0	14.3	14.0	12.0	30
Not applicable because I live alone	1.8	3.8	7.1	1.8	3.6	9
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	56	80	56	57		249

The matter of Bible reading can also be approached from the perspective of gender. When categorized in this way, it appears that the female members tend to read the Bible alone a little more frequently than the male members. This may be because more of them have time and opportunity for this in a home setting.

Table 4. Personal Bible reading and gender

If you live with someone else / others, do you also read the Bible yourself?	Male	Female	Total %	N
Two or more times a day	4.7	5.8	5.3	13
Once a day	25.2	26.1	25.7	63
Now and then	50.5	56.5	53.9	132
I usually don't read the Bible by myself	16.8	7.2	11.4	28
Not applicable because I live alone	2.8	4.3	3.7	9
Total %	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	107	138		245

When the numbers in the first two rows in the next table are added up, it appears that more than 40% of the younger members read the Bible alone at least once a day, which is significantly higher than what is done by older members, who score between approximately 25% (26 to 35 years old) and 30% (36 to 45 years old and the 46 or older group). The 46 or older group includes the elderly, who presumably have more time for Bible study. So the explanation should not be sought in the direction of who has time available. A factor that could account for the difference may be that various elders tend to stress personal Bible study when visiting younger members.

Table 5. Personal Bible reading and age

If you live with someone else / others, do you also read the Bible yourself?	15-25 years old.	26-35 years old	36-45 years old	46 or older	Total %	N
Two or more times a day	2.4	2.2	5.8	7.7	5.3	13
Once a day	38.1	23.9	25.0	22.1	25.8	63
Now and then	42.9	52.2	61.5	54.8	53.7	131
I usually don't read the Bible by myself	7.1	19.6	7.7	11.5	11.5	28
Not applicable because I live alone	9.5	2.2	0.0	3.8	3.7	9
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	42	46	52	104		244

Prayer can be said to be a vital indicator of spiritual life. As the Heidelberg Catechism puts it, "prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness which God requires of us."[330] It is therefore interesting to see what the responses are to a question about this.

Table 6. Frequency of prayer

How often do you pray or listen to a prayer?	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Often, besides at mealtimes	27.9	25.9	25.0	27.6	26.5	69
Once or twice a day besides at mealtimes	62.3	69.4	55.4	62.1	63.1	164
At mealtimes	9.8	4.7	16.1	10.3	9.6	25
Now and then	0.0	0.0	3.6	0.0	0.8	2
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	85	56	58		260

One could get the impression that prayer is slightly less of a priority in congregation C1. However, as can be seen in Appendix Three ("The Respondents and their Background") a proportionately lower percentage of the respondents in "C1" live in the home of someone who is or was an office bearer. This may have some influence on the answers given in regard to prayer. Nevertheless, it is striking that about 16% of the respondents from that congregation prays or listens to prayer only at mealtimes and that a few members indicate that they only pray "now and then." That is definitely a topic the elders could focus on in their visits. The overall picture of all congregations is more

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[330] *Book of Praise*, 524. See Q&A 116.

reassuring in that about 63% of the communicant members pray once or twice a day

besides at mealtimes, and about 27% more often than that.

Outreach Efforts

If someone has an active bond with God, does this make such a person more

likely to reach out to others about the Christian faith? It is worth reflecting on this

question aside from the issue of church participation. After all, it is possible that someone

who does not feel particularly connected to the congregation of which he or she is a

member will still reach out to others outside the congregation by talking about the

Christian faith. The next table helps bring this matter into focus. The rows express how

often the respondents read the Bible or listen to a Bible reading, while the columns

address the question "Do you talk with people outside our church community about the

Christian faith when suitable opportunities arise?"

Table 7. Bible reading and talking about the Christian faith.

	Yes	Sometimes	Never	Total %	N
More than three times a day	19.1	14.3	0.0	15.3	40
Two or three times a day	64.9	61.0	84.6	63.6	166
Once a day	13.8	21.4	7.7	18.0	47
Now and then and on Sundays	2.1	3.2	7.7	3.1	8
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	94	154	13		261

The number of those who never talk with people outside the church community

about the Christian faith is relatively low (13 of 261). None of them reads the Bible more

than three times a day. Almost 85% of the members in this group read the Bible two or

three times a day, but this does not impel them to reach out to others.

To a limited degree, the frequency of prayer does serve as an indicator as to how

likely it is that someone will reach out to people outside the church community to talk

about the Christian faith. This can be seen in the next table.

Table 8. Prayer and talking about the Christian faith

	Yes	Sometimes	Never	Total %	N
Often, besides at mealtimes	37.2	20.9	15.4	26.5	69
Once or twice a day besides at mealtimes	54.3	68.6	61.5	63.1	164
At mealtimes	7.4	9.8	23.1	9.6	25
Now and then	1.1	0.7	0.0	0.8	2
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	94	153	13		260

Worship Services

Although it can be said that all of life is worship (Ro 12:1), meeting together with fellow congregation members is a highlight of the week, involving communion with God together with his people. He speaks through the proclamation of his Word and they respond together in prayer and song.

All Canadian Reformed Churches have two worship services on Sunday. Those services are not the same. Church members are therefore strongly encouraged to attend both. As can be seen from the table below, the frequency of church attendance among the respondents is generally quite high. Elders who get to know the members in their wards well should be able to discern whether or not there are reasons for pastoral concern in regard to those who are absent from worship services.

Table 9. Frequency of church attendance

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Twice each Sunday	86.9	89.7	83.1	95.0	88.8	237
Once each Sunday	8.2	6.9	6.8	3.3	6.4	17
A few times a month	0.0	1.1	1.7	0.0	0.7	2
Once or twice each Sunday	4.9	2.3	8.5	1.7	4.1	11
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	87	59	60		267

Connectedness

The Canadian Reformed Churches include the Apostles' Creed in their confessions. One element in that creed concerns the "communion of saints." This

involves having communion with Christ as well as being involved in each others' lives as members of a community of faith.[331] How "connected" do the respondents feel as members of the church? That is an important question, since it has a direct bearing on their spiritual lives. When the percentages of members who feel "quite well connected" and "very well connected" are combined there is a striking dissimilarity between the two city congregations: The approximate totals are: R1 = 59%, R2 = 61%, C1 = 51%,

C2 = 65%. Such numbers as well as those in the "somewhat disconnected" and "very disconnected" categories should provide food for thought and discussion for the elders.[332]

A sense of connectedness or a lack of connectedness is not necessarily because of the nature of a congregation as a body. It can also come from within certain members themselves. One member noted that "in many ways the degree to which you feel connected is directly related to the degree to which you involve yourself: you reap what you sow!" Another member who feels "connected" but not more than that remarked that "this has partially to do with the private nature our family has."

Connectedness and Bible Reading or Prayer

Bible reading and prayer are essential ingredients in cultivating the relationship with God through Jesus Christ. One can expect that this will also have a positive impact on a person's relationship with other people. A strong love for God should go hand in hand with signs of love for fellow church members. One can expect this to lead to a strong sense of connectedness with them. Not surprisingly, a higher frequency of Bible reading as well as prayer correlates in a positive way with how connected someone feels

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[331] This is explained in Question and Answer 55 of the Heidelberg Catechism. See the *Book of Praise*, 495.
[332] All the tables containing the statistical information referred to in this section on "Connectedness" can be found in the corresponding section and subsections of Appendix Four.

as a church member. These are not absolute indicators, but they do make a difference for

a significant number of people.

Connectedness and Worship Services

There is a correlation between how connected someone feels as member of the

church and preparation for Sunday worship services. Among the 25 respondents who feel

"somewhat disconnected," 24% do not prepare for worship services at all while another

8% of them only "try to get enough sleep." This lack of preparation is something elders

can raise with church members who indicate that they do not feel very connected with the

church. However, a behavioural change in this regard will not have a significant impact

unless it is addressed together with the underlying issue of a person's relationship with

God. Questions regarding Bible reading and prayer should therefore also enter into the

picture.

One member who reported feeling "very disconnected" indicated not looking

forward to going to church unless attending elsewhere. Such a remark serves as a

reminder that feeling disconnected should not only be attributed to lack of preparation for

worship services. Other factors can play a role as well.

Those who go to church more often also tend to feel more connected than those

who attend services less frequently. However, while church attendance may be helpful in

strengthening a sense of connectedness with God and with other members, it is not the

only factor which needs consideration.

Connectedness and Participation

When people make public profession of faith before becoming communicant

members of a Canadian Reformed Church, one of the questions they are expected to

answer in the affirmative is: "do you firmly resolve to commit your whole life to the Lord's service as a living member of the church?" Being a living member of the church can be expressed in various ways. It is interesting to note how respondents answered question 9 of the survey: "Are you part of a Bible study group, committee or volunteer group (includes choir) in the church, or involved in the local Christian school?" It turns out that the participation level is quite high, averaging 71% in the rural churches and 79% in the city churches. For those belonging to the rural churches occupation and distance from the church are factors which undoubtedly play a role.

Those who feel "very well connected" have the highest percentage of participation in the activities listed in question 9 (88% as compared to 66% of those who only feel "connected."). However, involvement does not automatically lead to a greater sense of connectedness. This means that if members complain about not feeling very "connected" to the church, elders should not be too quick simply to encourage them to be more involved. Rather, they should try to ascertain what factors may be leading to this sense of disconnectedness.

Connectedness and Mutual Edification

Members can be expected to talk with fellow church members about the Christian faith when suitable opportunities arise. The congregations show a similar degree of openness between church members when talking about the Christian faith (R1: 74%; R2: 77%; C1 68%; C2: 78%). The difference between C1 and C2 is virtually absent when it comes to talking with people outside the church community about the Christian faith.

This gives reason to conclude that the difference cannot simply be explained by supposing that the members of C1 are simply less open than those in C2. Internal dynamics within that congregation must be different than in C2. Although the difference is not great compared to other congregations, it is worth noting that some members of C1 also express hesitation in regard to the importance of hospitality.

Where there are concerns about how well members interact with each other and seek to build each other up spiritually, elders should reflect on the role they can play in fostering a spirit of greater openness among the members.

Connectedness and Immigrant Background

Choosing the name *"Canadian* Reformed Churches" was a deliberate choice made by the immigrants who arrived in Canada and established this federation of churches. They did not wish to turn their backs on their country of origin, but they did wish to become part of Canadian society and welcome fellow Canadians into their midst. As their familiarity with the English language increased, they switched to this language in their worship services.

The question now is whether or not language and cultural barriers present an impediment to feeling connected. This could affect members who immigrated to Canada years ago, but who never learned the language well enough to feel part of Canadian culture or to feel at home among an increasing number of members who have been born and raised in Canada. It could also affect people who have immigrated more recently. As can be seen in the relevant table in Appendix Four, whether someone indicated "yes" or "no" in regard to having been born in Canada has little bearing on how connected he or she feels as a church member. The statistics give reason to conclude that being an

immigrant in these congregations does not in itself present a significant reason for feeling connected or disconnected.

Connectedness, Gender and Age

When the full range of scores for "connected" to "very well connected" is added up for each gender, there is no significant difference. However there is some variation in the scores of each category when viewed separately. In the 36 to 45 year old category the women feel significantly more connected than the men.

If during home visits elders notice than they are dealing with people who do not feel very well connected to the church, it is important to explore the reasons with them and to encourage them to see a sense of disconnectedness as something to overcome instead of resigning themselves to it. This is especially important with regard to men and women in families with growing children, since the potential negative impact of this can radiate into the next generation.

The percentage of those who feel "connected" drops from approximately 42% in the 15 to 25 years old category to 28% among those who are 26 to 35 years old; at the same time the ones in the latter age group who feel "somewhat disconnected" or "very disconnected" see an increase in their number. Possibly this can be attributed to the fact that most of the respondents in those categories have left schools that they originally attended with fellow church members. Next to this, shifts in the intensity of certain relationships take place since couples often form and get married during this decade of their lives. Nevertheless, the statistics give reason for concern.

The combined percentages of the respondents whose feelings of connectedness range from "quite well connected" to "very well connected" increases in the higher age

brackets. Looking at it from a positive angle, one could possibly observe that feeling more connected is part of the aging process. There is something to be said for this, since being young is often associated with feeling insecure. Another point worth pondering, however, is that older people tend to be more inclined to seek face-to-face contact or contact by telephone. While young people also connect in these ways, many also rely on the internet. This medium does not necessarily contribute strongly to feeling personally connected with a congregation as a whole. In any case, the statistical data points to a gap that needs to be bridged.

Elders should devote special attention to young people as they leave school and make the transition into occupations or pursue further education, as well as when they either form or do not form relationships leading to marriage. They are entering into a decade in life when their sense of connectedness to the church can decrease significantly. The danger is if this does happen, the sense of disconnectedness may gradually increase as they get older to the point of them leaving the church.

Connectedness and Elder Visits

The Canadian Reformed Churches in Manitoba divide their congregations into wards according to the number of elders, with one elder being responsible for a defined group of people. Efforts are made to distribute the members among the wards in such a way that there is equality "with respect to the duties of their office."[333] One of the chief responsibilities of elders is to visit the members of the congregation who are in their wards at least once annually. Official annual visits are usually made in the homes by the "ward elder" together with a fellow elder and generally last for an hour to an hour and a half. Informal contacts take place in a variety of ways, often by telephone if not face to

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[333] *Book of Praise*, 664. See Article 25 of the Church Order on that page.

face. Depending on circumstances, informal visits are generally done by an elder alone or together with his wife.

The data concerning the frequency of contact between elders and congregation members shows a correlation with their sense of connectedness. This gives reason to conclude that elders can play a significant role in alleviating a sense of disconnectedness not only by encouraging members to become more involved in church life, but also by being more personally involved with them as their elder.

People who indicate that they feel "disconnected" require extra attention. However, how much attention would be "enough"? G. Nederveen, who surveyed elderly members of Canadian Reformed Churches, recommended that elders visit the elderly twice a year.[334] This certainly has merit in view of the data mentioned above. However, next to visits, other informal forms of communication can also be effective to enhance the sense of connectedness. A telephone call or a chat when elders happen to meet a member in their ward also contributes to the overall impression as to whether or not there is "enough" contact. In the perception of most members, this goes a long way in ensuring that they feel that the elders stay in touch with them "enough." Even a slight increase in the amount of such interaction with a ward elder can have a significant positive impact on members of the church next to the annual home visits. This can be seen in the next table,

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[334] Gijsbertus Nederveen, "Life under the Umbrella of Promise," 141. Part of his research involved assessing responses of the elderly to a "Needs Assessment Questionnaire" that he sent out focusing on pastoral visits by elders, deacons, and ministers in sixty churches within two Reformed church federations. Of the 95 members who responded to the question as to how often they expect to see a visit from their elder annually, his table of results shows that about 54% indicated that twice a year would be an "optimum number of visits," while 28% were satisfied with one. That leaves 17% who have a greater need for more frequent visits while one respondent would be satisfied with visits "if necessary." In fact, however, only 20% of 117 respondents actually receive two visits annually. As Nederveen points out on page 147, "a significant gap of 33% needs to be bridged" in regard to the majority group that would like to see two visits but only receives one. He also notes on page 149 that "most elderly would rather have short visits more often than few long visits. Visits of half an hour to forty-five minutes seem to be optimum for all." Assuming that a district consists of fifteen addresses, he points out that it should be possible to visit such members two or three times a year, depending on how the visits are scheduled.

which looks at the connection between the amount of informal contact with an elder

(rows), and how often the person's elder usually stays in touch between the annual home

visits, either through a visit, a telephone call, or a chat (columns).

Table 10. Assessment of frequency of contact with an elder

	Five or more times a year	Three or four times a year	Once or twice a year	Never, or almost never	Only when special matters arise	Total %	N
Yes	91.1	66.0	47.7	13.6	44.2	52.5	136
It could be better	8.9	32.1	43.1	45.5	36.5	34.0	88
No	0.0	1.9	9.2	40.9	19.2	13.5	35
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	45	53	65	44	52		259

The Annual Home Visit

How do members experience visits by elders? What can be done to improve the

effectiveness of such visits? These are examples of questions relevant to improving the

functioning of elders. We will examine this topic from the perspective of congregation

members before moving on to the topic of how elders experience their work.

Communication is a two-way street. For this reason it is not only important for

elders to prepare themselves when visiting members. It is good for all members to give

thought to an upcoming visit. The statistics show that this is not an automatic given in

any of the congregations. About 73% of the respondents prepare themselves for the

annual home visit. This indicates that about 27% view such visits as a matter of routine

without much awareness of the spiritual importance of good home visits. Ministers can

try to change the attitude of the members by educating them to understand the work of

elders better and to prepare accordingly for constructive conversations. Elders can also be

encouraged to do what they can to ensure that their visits are productive.

The responses concerning whether or not members prepare for the annual home visit show that when they do prepare themselves, this will tend to have a positive impact on the quality of such a visit. To help members prepare, elders in many Reformed churches establish a topic for the annual home visits. The rationale behind this is that it gives members an opportunity to reflect on the topic in relation to their lives. When the visit takes place, they have a better idea what to expect and more fruitful discussion may be possible.

After elders have chosen a topic to be used during the annual home visits, it is usually announced in advance to the congregation in one way or another. Ministers also prepare the congregation by preaching a sermon relevant to this early in the season.

In the Survey of the Elders, the responses to question 10 show that 18 of 26 elders make use of a certain topic, while another three do so occasionally. Seventeen of 26 (or 65%) find using a prearranged topic helpful, while four indicated that this was only "sometimes" the case. Two oppose the practice and three expressed no opinion.

Written responses of the elders expressed differing opinions as to whether making use of a prearranged discussion topic is a workable way for them to enter into a discussion with people they visit. Many were positive about this approach, feeling that it is "beneficial to set the tone," and can be "used as a springboard." It helps in preparing for the visit and it also "begins and directs conversation," giving "focus" to the discussion.

Elders also expressed the awareness that flexibility is needed. After all, "no visit to a home is ever the same as the last one, so an elder must always be prepared to deal

with the situation as it presents itself." For this reason, one elder explained that he simply uses a "Bible text applicable to the family or to an issue of life."

How do congregation members view having a different topic each year for the whole congregation? Does it enhance the discussions, giving them a useful structure and purpose, or does it get in the way of open-hearted communication on other issues that really matter? Except for congregation C1, the majority of respondents prefer having a designated topic for the home visit season. The overall percentage (60%) of those in favour is slightly lower than the assessment by the elders (65%). However, a substantial number of people in three of the four congregations listed above are undecided about its merits and in congregations R1 and C1, close to 20% oppose this practice. Evidently if it is to be continued, some thought should be given to addressing the concerns of those opposed to it.

Members in favour of having an annual topic offered various arguments in support of their position. Having a theme can help the elder prepare for the annual home visit and it can give structure to the visit. One individual remarked that "this gives the elders unity when visiting." An annual topic can also help smooth the way for congregation members who are wondering what to expect and stimulate reflection. A few members also mentioned that a sermon on the text at the beginning of the home visit season is helpful for the elders and the entire congregation.

Looking beyond the level of individual visits, someone pointed out that "the theme helps for continuity in the congregation and many themes can be applied to all different situations." A respondent approved of this approach since it gave the push to "study for it." On the other hand, as another member pointed out, since it shapes the

expectations it can also make people be "prepared to answer questions only on a specific topic."

Some gave qualified approval, indicating their agreement "as long as the topic is related to daily life" and "as long as it doesn't prevent conversation from developing spontaneously." Another member commented that most visits end up leading to "spiritual conversation" anyway. Other respondents expressed indifference to the approach. "It's good that the elders have a theme or 'area' they want to address each year. But we usually forget what it is by the time our visit comes around..." "It's nice to have a topic, but I don't need it arranged to discuss my spiritual life."

Objections to having a stated topic for a home visit arise when members feel that the visit degenerates into what they perceive as a test of knowledge or a Catechism class, instead of an open, personal discussion on matters of faith and life. When there is a topic there is the danger that the conversation will be impersonal, and as one put it, people will come up with "pre-thought 'pat' answers." There were also complaints that "it makes conversation somewhat stilted and contrived" and "forced and stiff." Such people prefer a personal approach based on knowledge of the situation of the family circumstances.

A member who did not object to beginning with a certain topic or theme remarked that she found that elders "usually come with preset questions and don't just go with the flow and so get to know our walk." Another member complained "I feel that if I don't initiate a personal discussion (about personal faith) the elders do not do so (in general)." This illustrates the problem that proceeding from a set topic, which is the usual practice, does not work well all the time for entering into a more personal conversation.

However, even without a particular topic, it is possible for elders to develop an approach that is too structured and rigid to allow for much personal conversation.

Visits should be oriented to the family or individual. After all, it is important to focus on the needs and concerns of the family. Opening the visit in a casual way can help elders find out how the member(s) live. Later during the conversation it should be possible either for them to raise concerns or for members to draw attention to certain issues. Ample time should be available for this. Otherwise having a special topic can even undermine the purpose of a home visit.

One member, who was "undecided" on the question of whether or not it would be helpful to have a theme for the annual home visit, observed that the home visits were only "sometimes" helpful. The reason given was that "often the same questions arise year after year." Such a comment illustrates the need to ensure that there is flexibility as well as variety in the approach taken during the visits. Having a different topic each year can help accomplish that goal. If a suitable passage is chosen for a visit and presented thoughtfully for interaction, the result can be positive.

If a topic is used, a word of caution brought forward by one respondent should be kept in mind: "We should always base the visits on God's Word—but, it is not a Bible study... the elders must be ready to be specific to the family." Again another stated that "it is at least a very good starting point." Such a starting point was felt to be especially useful if the members had "nothing in common (other than church) with the elders visiting."

When a topic is used to get a conversation going, much depends on how flexible the elders are in sensing the needs of the person(s) being visited. After all, as one

respondent put it, having a topic "can be beneficial but it can also cause the conversation to center on something that is not an issue with the people being visited." For this reason, one member suggested that "the Bible topic could be specific for each individual." Another mentioned the possibility of choosing a mutually agreed upon topic which could then be tailored to the needs of the individual. Having a topic "may help," responded one, "but I think having a personal relationship, i.e. elders who really care, helps more." Another expressed a similar sentiment: "Elders should know me; therefore it should not be difficult to talk."

The Preaching

The proclamation of the Word is a central element in Reformed worship services. For this reason, regardless of whether or not elders begin their visit by focussing on a particular topic or theme for the year, they should try to find out if the sermons are reaching the people in the pew. Discussion should also focus on whether or not the members work with the Word that is preached, and if they do, how this takes place. A conversation along these lines requires sensitivity, since elders should not give the impression they are soliciting negative feedback about the minister. At the same time, if the members indicate they have problems with the preaching, the elders need to listen carefully without automatically defending the minister.

The next table gives an overview of responses to the question "During their annual home visits, do the elders usually discuss with you whether or not the preaching helps you to grow spiritually?" It appears that this is often the case. In one congregation, however, 5% of the time such a discussion never takes place.

Table 11. Personal spiritual growth through the preaching?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	85.2	81.2	72.9	93.3	83.0	220
Sometimes	14.8	18.8	22.0	6.7	15.8	42
Never	0.0	0.0	5.1	0.0	1.1	3
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	85	59	60		265

If criticism of the preaching is voiced, elders should not immediately conclude there is a problem with the preaching. Criticism can also be a sign of spiritual problems on the part of the person who is listening. Discernment is therefore important. That can set the stage for fruitful discussion.

Sometimes unreasonable criticism is brought forward. If that happens, elders should not be afraid to defend good preaching. Members sometimes also need to be reminded of the importance of praying for the ministry of the Word and for a positive listening attitude.

Ministers as well as elders should be quite interested in discussions about how to promote understandable, edifying preaching. Elders should therefore be prepared to give careful thought to whatever criticism they hear, filtering out what is not useful and passing on to the minister what is constructive. Members can be very perceptive and come up with good suggestions that can help the elders guide the minister in his preaching.

Self-examination

K. Jonker points out that when home visits were introduced by Calvin in Geneva the original intention was to ensure that members would participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper in a proper way, with sufficient knowledge of the faith. Attention was also paid to their walk of life. This was part of the "spiritual government" of the church.

The visits were meant to be a personalized form of the ministry of the gospel for supervising and edifying the members of the church. The pastoral aspect predominated, but there was potentially room for church discipline if needed.[335]

The connection between home visits and the Lord's Supper continues to function in Reformed churches, although not as explicitly as in the past when visits were often conducted prior to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. The spiritual care that takes place through home visits now is more general in character. The Lord's Supper can still be brought into focus, but it is not necessarily a special point of attention unless the need for church discipline comes into the picture.[336]

Is it enough for elders to adopt a watchful attitude in regard to the sacraments, or can they do more in a proactive sense to ensure that the administration of these sacraments is beneficial? The minister or elders can make a point of discussing the meaning of baptism some time before it is administered. As to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, members are usually urged to prepare themselves for the celebration of this sacrament through a sermon held a week prior to the event. However, elders can also discuss the matter of self-examination with them in a positive way in preparation for the celebration.[337] The number of members who indicate that self-examination has never

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[335] K. Jonker, "The History of the Home Visit," in *From House to House: Articles and helps for beginning elders*, The Reformed Guardian: New Series, no. 19, ed. W. Huizinga (2004): 11-14.

[336] This is evident in Article 22 of the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches, which includes in the task description of the elders that they are "faithfully to visit the members of the congregation in their homes to comfort, instruct, and admonish them with the Word of God, reproving those who behave improperly. They shall exercise Christian discipline according to the command of Christ against those who show themselves unbelieving and ungodly and refuse to repent and shall watch that the sacraments are not profaned." See the *Book of Praise*, 663.

[337] After warning against participating in "an unworthy manner," the apostle Paul urges members to examine themselves before eating of the bread and drinking of the cup to avoid eating and drinking judgment on themselves (1 Co 11:27-32).

been discussed with them (approximately 30%) shows that there is room for significant improvement.

Regular Voluntary Financial Contributions

Giving financially to the church is a way in which members show thankfulness to God. Local contributions support the continuation of the ministry of the Word in their midst, various activities in the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches, as well as mission outreach elsewhere.

The responses to question 13 of the Survey of Individual Communicant Members show that the personal assessment of giving is quite favourable among most of the respondents. The overall picture shows there is no large discrepancy between the rural and city congregations. Nevertheless, an average of 7% of the respondents indicates that they should be giving more. Such openness is refreshing and the acknowledgement is important. Elders could perhaps discuss with them in more detail why they are holding back contributions.

In the Canadian Reformed Churches, the emphasis is placed on giving willingly (Ex 25:2; 2 Co 9:7). At the same time, there is the awareness that if someone does not give at all, or only very sparingly, there may be financial or spiritual problems that should be addressed. The numbers in the tables of Appendix Four lead to the conclusion that it could be beneficial for the elders to discuss this with the members to explore what underlies their pattern of giving in their situation.

Christian stewardship and the obligation to honour the Lord with first fruits are sensitive issues. It is important to make it clear why such matters are being brought up during a visit. After all, members may otherwise draw wrong conclusions, as one did who

mentioned in connection with his "worst experiences" of the work of elders: "Elders after your money, using threats to push their own agenda."

Questions Often Raised During Home Visits

Responses to question 12 of the Survey of Elders show that whether or not elders work with a topic or theme for the annual home visits, half of them often make use of a list of questions in their discussions with members, while the other half often does not do this.

The impression given by the fact that half of the elders only "sometimes" work with a list of questions is that they are perhaps more ready or able to go with the flow of a discussion during a visit than those who usually work with a list. Possibly they use a list of questions as a fallback position in case the discussion does not unfold smoothly.

Responses that elders gave to question 13 of the Survey of Elders provide an impression of the wide variety of questions often raised during home visits. The number of relevant items in the list that could be circled makes it clear that not everything would necessarily be dealt with in a single visit. The list below is by no means exhaustive. It is simply a sampling of various themes that often surface in literature written for the benefit of elders in their visits. The questions are indicated in abbreviated form below. The complete phrasing can be found in Appendix Two this dissertation. The next table gives an impression of what frequently enters into discussions.

Table 12. Topics discussed by elders during home visits

	R1 (7 elders)	R2 (7 elders)	C1 (5 elders)	C2 (7 elders)
Questions				
1. Relationship with God	7	7	3	7
2. Doubts concerning salvation	4	3	2	4
3. Motivation to serve God	4	3	2	3
4. Bible reading	5	3	1	3

Table 12 continued. Topics discussed by elders during home visits				
	R1 (7 elders)	R2 (7 elders)	C1 (5 elders)	C2 (7 elders)
5. Prayer	6	4	5	7
6. Preparation for worship services.	2	4	3	5
7. Attendance	5	3	5	6
8. Preaching	6	6	5	7
9. Self-examination	3	3	2	2
10. Commitment to being a living church member	5	5	4	7
11. Connectedness	6	5	3	6
12. Bible Study group	4	6	5	7
13. Committee or volunteer group	3	2	4	5
14. Friends	5	1	1	4
15. Talk about faith with fellow members	6	5	1	4
16. Talk about faith with others	5	3	4	7
17. Hospitality	3	2	3	5
18. Contributions	6	3	5	7
19. Marriage / single	7	4	5	7
20. Children	7	6	3	6
21. Work	5	6	5	7
22. Entertainment	4	2	3	7
23. Special Problems	6	5	4	7

The number of elders of each of the four congregations who responded is listed in the top line of the table. In each column one can see how many of them often address the topics listed on the left.

It may seem strange that not all the elders in congregation C1 devote specific attention to the relationship of the members to God. Their underlying assumption is perhaps that the nature of this relationship will come to light in the course of a conversation about the fruit of faith. However, this is not necessarily the case. People sometimes engage in activities such as Bible reading, prayer, and church attendance out of habit. There are also members who struggle with doubts about their salvation. A strong, living faith should therefore not be taken for granted.

The list of various topics should not be seen as something elders deal with exhaustively on each visit. As one elder explained it, "they all apply at one time or

another, again dependent on how the visit goes or what comes up. It might be limited to one topic." Other matters also enter into discussions. Examples given were: "Christian education," "how things are going in university or college," and given how society is today, "the seventh commandment and their adherence to it." It should be noted that many ethical issues would also come up in due time if a consistory would commit itself to working its way through the Ten Commandments.

A few elders commented that they found the list of topics mentioned in the Survey of Elders beneficial. "Now that I read this list, all of them should be circled. Thanks. I will keep this list at hand." "I did not circle all as you raise a few interesting ones that I have not asked and now I wonder why I never asked them. As you can see we are always learning. I will have to add them to my list. I do not always ask every question but use them as a guide, knowing each situation and household."

Six of the 26 elders indicate that they simply ask direct questions when visiting members. The others ask direct questions but also approach matters in a more indirect way. As one elder phrased it, "different situations require different means." Another wrote: "If the conversation flows freely I'm quite content to draw conclusions based on what they say. If, however, they're not so free to speak, then I will ask the questions to get the answers I'm looking for."

Questions are important. However, much depends on how they are formulated and whether they open the way for further discussion or only leave room for brief answers. Various respondents to the Survey of Individual Communicant Members indicated that they felt uncomfortable because the visit felt somewhat like "an interrogation." Visits should not degenerate into a "question and answer discussion" that,

for example, gives them the impression that they are being quizzed about their Bible knowledge instead of being engaged in an open discussion about their spiritual life.

Spiritual openness

Spiritual openness is essential between elders and the members they visit. How the elders approach a member can have a great impact on whether or not the member will open up and engage in meaningful conversation. For this reason it is important to gain insight as to how effectively the elders are connecting with congregation members. Being aware of potential problem areas can provide an incentive to connect with the members in such a way that the discussion will be upbuilding.

Adult members

Members show considerable variation in their self-assessment as to how successful elders are in getting them to talk about their walk with God. It is possible that some of the variation which can be seen in Appendix Four is caused by the higher percentage of respondents from two congregations who either were or are office bearers or who live in the home of an office bearer. However, the results of the "Survey of Elders" in congregation C1 showed that only three of the five elders directly address the topic of a person's walk with God. If elders approach this matter only indirectly, it may become difficult for the members to open up about their spiritual lives.

It was possible to treat those who do not live in the home of someone who was or is an office bearer as a sub-group, comparing their responses to those of other members. The percentages show that almost 24% who are not from the homes of people who have served or are serving as office bearers indicate that the elders succeed "very well" in getting them to talk about their walk with God. Only approximately 13% of those who

are from the homes of someone who was or is an office bearer respond in this way. One reason could be that elders and deacons and their families who are being visited feel somewhat inhibited by exposing vulnerabilities to the elders whereas they may feel they should be capable of setting a good "example" in the congregation. On the other hand, there is still a desire for open conversation. About 65% of respondents who come from the homes of office bearers or former office bearers indicate that elders succeed "quite well" in getting them to talk about their walk with God. This is about 23% higher than the group of those not in the homes of office bearers or former office bearers and is more in line with what is to be expected, given their higher level of involvement in church life and their greater sense of connectedness to the congregation.

Children

When visiting families, elders face special challenges in trying to engage children of various ages in conversation. They do this with varying degrees of success. Children grow up in homes that differ from each other. Some parents are easy to engage in open conversation. Others are more reserved. The percentages in each congregation indicating how successful the elders are in getting their children to talk about their walk with God are significantly lower than the scores for communicant members. An average of only about 4% feels that elders succeed "very well" in regard to their children.

Not all parents agree that elders should be adept at communicating with their children. One member who observed that elders do not succeed in getting her children to talk about their walk with God also stated, "No elder will ever be able to communicate with a once-a-year visit. They will remain strangers. But I don't think it is necessary that my child(ren) has a relationship with the elder. My child should be able to communicate

with me, my spouse, or close friends/uncles/aunts. This would be too much to expect from an elder (far too much!). They also have full-time jobs—often 10 or 12 hour/day jobs—and the family, so I would not expect them to know all about my family or be able to communicate with them." For other parents, however, having an elder who can communicate well with their children is so important that "if one of the children does not connect with the elder, the elder should not be too proud to give it over to another elder."

Problem Sharing

Scripture gives the mandate to Christians to "carry each other's burdens" (Gal 6:2). To what degree are people prepared to allow their elders to help them in this? A significant percentage of the members of the churches would not feel free to share physical, mental, or emotional problems with an elder even though an average of 85% of the respondents trust that personal information would be kept confidential.

There is variation in regard to what kinds of problems people feel ready to share. Some feel free to share mental, emotional or spiritual problems, but are somewhat reserved in regard to physical problems unless there is a need for surgery or other medical treatment and the prayer of the congregation is desired. It is also not always easy for members to share mental health issues with an elder, since there is the feeling that such office bearers are not equipped to deal with such matters. Another problem is when the elders are "close family" or if there are "working relationships." It is harder to be open with an office bearer under such circumstances. For this reason, it is not surprising that a respondent indicated that if there were difficulties he would probably explain this to his pastor and ask him how to deal with them. Others find it hardest to admit to having "spiritual problems."

Even when an elder is to receive a visit from a fellow elder, it is not necessarily easy to be open. One such office bearer indicated that he would probably only feel free to share "spiritual problems." If encountering difficulties in sharing a problem he indicated that it would help to "know an elder better," before becoming more open. Another also stressed that "it all depends on the rapport established."

Question 31 asked what would help respondents to be more open. A number of them answered that they would be more open if they could trust that their private matters would not be discussed anywhere without their prior knowledge. How an elder comes across is also very important in terms of setting the stage for the disclosure of personal problems. One member who was very open indicated that some elders "have been very intimidating and not extremely compassionate." A similar sentiment was voiced by another member in the same congregation. It is therefore not surprising to read responses indicating that whatever problems a person would share would depend on who the elder is. Others indicated that they would prefer to talk to their minister if necessary.

Responsiveness

As men who are called to shepherd the sheep, elders may find it necessary to give instruction, advice, or perhaps admonitions. Seeing the elders as gifts given by Christ to the church serves to motivate the members to respond to them as instruments of Jesus Christ with humility and thankfulness, in the awareness that the gifts that Christ gives are for the benefit of the body. How do the sheep rate their own responsiveness?

The honesty with which respondents interacted with the questions was refreshing. In regard to how seriously members are prepared to take what the elders say, one commented that if problems occur, "the problem is more on my side than the elders."

Members generally recognize that eldership is a God-given office. They are therefore determined to take the words of elders seriously even though they have shortcomings, or as one put it, "no matter who he is." However, when such office bearers make comments, "it is important how they bring it." This was echoed by another who wrote, "as long as the Bible is used as the guide and the advice is meant to motivate or encourage me to be a living member with childlike faith. Personal views tend to come across as mightier or holier than thou."

Sometimes impediments to responding positively can come from the side of the elders. One respondent asked: "Has the elder taken the log out of his own eye?" Another indicated that "it is a little hard to listen to an elder tell our teenagers not to give up on Young Peoples' Bible Study (our kids get discouraged by the attitudes / behaviours there) when their own teenagers do not attend." As noted on page 31 of this dissertation, elders are called to apply the law of God in a spirit of mercy and love. What they say must be based on Scripture, but what is at least as important is how they convey it.

Aside from whether or not what is said is biblical and brought with a humble attitude, it also needs to be appropriate. If the advice that is given is not based on a proper understanding of the problems, the result is that it is still "not usable." Elders need to listen carefully.

Even without a strong sense of the position of elders as people who have a God-given task, positive experiences with helpful elders can lead to significant changes in attitude. One member made it clear that visits by the elders were helpful and as a result, this person is also prepared to take "instruction, advice or perhaps admonitions" seriously. Previously this was not the case, but this individual's elder stayed in touch

"five or more times a year." The frequency of contact was undoubtedly a factor that made it easier to return to the church.

Assessment of Annual Home Visits

Elders invest a lot of time in home visits. How do congregation members assess the impact of such efforts? Do they usually find those visits helpful? It seems that the word "helpful" used in question 19 was not clear enough for everyone. One member indicated, "I'm not sure if helpful is the right word but it is encouraging—both personally and the idea that one is part of a church that cares." For others, the question was clear enough to generate assessments that ranged from enthusiastic to quite negative. The following table gives an impression.

Table 13. Are the annual home visits by the elders usually helpful?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	49.2	45.3	30.5	66.1	47.5	126
Sometimes	39.3	51.2	61.0	30.5	46.0	122
Never	11.5	3.5	8.5	3.4	6.4	17
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	86	59	59		265

Helpful

What makes a visit "helpful"? Some indicated that it helps them feel "connected." They welcome the discussion with the elders, seeing this as an opportunity to re-evaluate their lives and refocus on their "good Christian living," talking about their personal faith life as well as church in general. Those offering evaluations repeatedly used the word "encouraging."

One younger member expressed appreciation for the fact that elders "generally try to teach new ways to help strengthen your faith." Another explained that an annual home visit "helps to get to know your elder(s), makes it easier to talk to him when need arises."

A respondent stated that "the Lord, in his providential good judgment, has always used the home visits, which are His, to strengthen, admonish, build, and preserve me in whatever way He has seen fit (thus refining me in His fire). Home visits are great! I wish we had more."

Sometimes Helpful

Not everyone is enthusiastic. There were also members who indicated that annual home visits are only "sometimes" helpful, depending on which elder visited them. It seems that proper preparation on the part of the elders could be an issue. One member indicated in this regard that "if there is no distinct purpose the conversation can easily degenerate into chitchat." This was also mentioned by another who described the annual home visits he experienced as being only helpful "to keep up on the latest church news."

Elders need to be known as people who can be trusted. When they talk about others, members will wonder whether matters told in confidence will be kept confidential or spread around in the congregation.

Aside from the issue of confidentiality, as one respondent noted concerning an elder who talks a lot about himself and about other ward members: "We would like him to show more interest in who we are as a family and as individual members of God's church." Indeed, if home visits are to be helpful, elders will have to learn to know the sheep. If they make reference to themselves or others, this will have to be done in a careful, functional way for edifying the person being visited.

How a visit is conducted is a factor that influences the evaluation of some. Various members indicated that they found the format too formal, their preference being an "informal visit or chat." However the elders do come in an official capacity, which is

noticeable in opening and closing with prayer as well as reading from Scripture at some time during the visit. "Official" should not be synonymous with "impersonal."

If congregation members disagree with an elder, the elder should also be careful not to let the conversation become a "defensive dialogue," as one respondent put it, but maintain an open attitude and ensure that the discussion is conducted in the light of Scripture. This is consistent with Paul's admonition to Timothy that "the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful" (2 Ti 2:24).

The fact that the official visit only takes place one a year makes it difficult for some respondents to open up. Having some informal contact between such visits would alleviate that problem and also do much to accommodate the wishes of those who feel that the annual home visit is too formal.

It is important for elders to make sure that a visit is not just a formality, but that it takes place in a thoughtful, personal way. Effort should be made to avoid giving the impression as one put it that "it's done more out of custom and tradition." This includes being prepared to listen carefully to the members.

A flexible approach will be more effective than approaching each visit with a rigid template. As one member put it, "Some elders seem to come with a prearranged agenda. This allows them to merely hear, not listen to the concerns raised." Similarly, another respondent suggested that it "would be better to talk about everyday happenings in life—i.e. work, hobbies, what you volunteer for, etc. ... I feel as if I am being examined rather than having a home visit."

According to one member, how helpful a visit is "depends on how much depth the elder works to. If so it is good for self reflection and examination. If superficial, it does not." It can take time for members to realize that having a helpful home visit requires input from the elders as well as from the one receiving the visit. A young woman in the 15 to 25 years old age bracket explained that she is "finally getting the courage to aid in making it more useful and a discussion." Another pointed out that visits are helpful "if I (or my family) have questions about a particular church topic or situation." Recognizing that is important. Elders can encourage the members in this process by interacting with them in a supportive way.

Never Helpful

There were also respondents in whose opinion the annual home visits were "never helpful." It seems that some elders may have been too determined to stick to certain topics during their visit, given a complaint that "they have their agenda and leave no time for needs/concerns of the family." This lack of focusing on a family may have also triggered another comment that the visits came across as being done out of a sense of duty instead of because of personal interest. The preference was to have "the elder and his wife come together some night for informal coffee."

A lack of prior informal contact was the primary issue for others. A sister in the "46 or older" age bracket commented: "How can you come for home visitation when you don't know the person" or when they "don't say anything to you all year round?" Such a complaint is a recurring theme among women of that age group. For a substantial conversation to take place there needs to be more interaction. This would also encourage such women to be more open about their problems.

Best Experiences of the Work of Elders

Members were quite responsive to question 33, which asked them to describe their "best experiences of the work of elders." They noted the value of "personal conversations" and found the visits "constructive," "beneficial" and "purposeful." The encouragement received from elders was heartening. One enthusiastically wrote that the good home visits were "too many to count."

Members were also happy to have opportunities during visits to encourage the elders in various ways. The wisdom imparted by elders was felt to be "practical." Significant elements that were mentioned included the reading of a Bible passage and its explanation, as well as prayer for the family. Many appreciative comments could be categorized together. They will be reviewed according to their common themes in the next paragraphs.

They were Genuinely Interested

The importance of informal contacts for building a relationship surfaced repeatedly in sentences such as: "An elder going to visit more often because he knew of a need. The extra visits before profession of faith." He "called when I wasn't in church to see where I was. Showed he cared and I was missed." Especially women in the "46 or older" category noted the importance of informal contacts. An older member, who indicated normally never having had informal contacts with her elder, described it as one of her "best experiences of the work of elders" that an elder "came by besides home visits." Another member who expressed feeling "very disconnected" from the congregation indicated appreciation for "casual social visits by an elder who actually cared (no preset agenda)."

A remark made by the member who appreciated attention from the elder beyond the term of office is worth pondering. During his period of office, an elder develops a trust relationship with the members he is visiting. This can involve intensive interaction. When the term of the elder has expired, it is understandable and also proper that the elder backs off to make room for his successor. An elder who has served for three years is usually also ready for a break. However, if such a person cuts himself off entirely from further contact with people who were in his ward, it can give the impression that the attention given previously was not really genuine. This can even interfere with future work if the same individual is ordained once again as an elder a few years later. This highlights the importance of continuing to show interest in the well-being of those who were visited, albeit with a lesser degree of intensity.

Home visits by elders are valued as a special form of pastoral care. Many stressed the importance of elders expressing "active interest" in their affairs. This is especially appreciated when there are difficulties in the family.

They Asked the Right Questions and Listened

Members also appreciated questions "about things that really matter," especially "questions outside of the routine ones" that show "genuine interest," such as focusing on a "life event." One wrote about "an elder who really got the children talking about their spiritual life." Another was grateful for "elders who listened—didn't necessarily agree, but we could discuss and challenge each other to grow." Appreciation was expressed for a "discerning approach" and for "listening, not just telling what to do."

A respondent felt that it was one of her "best experiences" that when one elder misunderstood her, the other listened more carefully and as a result the consistory was

able to understand her better and take what she brought forward more seriously. This highlights the importance of paying a visit with two elders, especially in a situation that can be tense.

In general, respondents were thankful for "relaxed conversation, upbuilding discussions" that helped them stay focused as Christians. They were glad to have discussions that gave them the opportunity to "unload" if needed. A respondent described talking about "the struggle with loneliness," and how the elders "listened, commented, and prayed for me." The elders also "talked about the frustratingly slow process of sanctification and I was encouraged to work on personal devotions."

It should not be taken for granted that a person who goes to church twice each Sunday, reads the Bible and prays regularly and is involved in church life does not need encouragement in regard to his or her relationship with God. One member described one of the best experiences of the work of elders as when they "encouraged us and our children how to communicate better with God."

They Showed Love

It is important for members to sense the love of Jesus Christ through the work of the elders. The ministry of reconciliation involves assuring people through the preaching of the gospel that their sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus Christ. However, elders can also play an important role in conveying the same message in a personal way to members who struggle with something they have done wrong. One such member treasures as one of his best experiences of the work of elders: "Assuring me that my sins are forgiven."

Members were grateful for various displays of "concern and compassion." Such love does not have to be shown in spectacular ways. Another member indicated that her best experiences were with "small things." One family noted with appreciation that the elders made them feel welcome when they moved into the area. Another member noted that her best experiences were when elders stayed "in contact" and were "very compassionate," "showing God's mercy." Hospitality was also mentioned with gratitude. Another aspect which should be noted in connection with showing love was brought forward by a member: "Know when/how to help and when to refer to specialists."

A crisis is a time of emotional upheaval that can be triggered by various events, such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, surgery, or other stressful situations where the normal coping mechanisms are being severely taxed or are found to be insufficient. Contact in one way or another is then especially important.[338] People expressed their special appreciation for the support received from elders in such circumstances. One member wrote: "During a time of personal crisis when I was feeling extreme uncertainty and self-doubt, the support and encouragement I received was tremendous. My elder gave me reading/study materials and visits of encouragement, prayer, patience and the strength to be patient... Knowing they are available if not to personally visit but with a phone call is reassuring."

One question that elders face is what to do in regard to visiting members at times of bereavement. After all, during such a period there would also be contact with the minister. Nederveen notes: "Those who did receive a pastoral visit from their elder at the time of bereavement spoke favourably of the elder's actions. They received spiritual

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[338] Howard W. Stone outlines essential "A-B-C steps" for helping in crisis situations: "(A) *A*chieve contact with the person; (B) *B*oil down the problem to its essentials; and (C) *C*ope actively with the problem" in his book: *Crisis Counseling*, Revised Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 38.

support and were comforted with the word of God. The elder reinforced the message of

the gospel and was sensitive about the loss."[339]

This finding was also echoed by many who responded to the Survey of Individual

Communicant Members. Visits following the sickness or death of loved ones were found

to be evidence of compassion and were supportive, helpful and meaningful. Even simple

caring gestures such as mowing someone's lawn during such a time were appreciated.

Repeated mention was also made of "elders who were very compassionate and

genuine after a miscarriage." As another respondent put it, this "validated the loss of the

baby, provided such comfort!"

They were Personal

It is important to pay attention to where the person being visited feels most

comfortable to engage in conversation. One older woman indicated that her best

experiences of the work of elders took place "sitting around the kitchen table." This

makes sense, since the kitchen table is where families usually have their meals and

engage each other in conversation as well. It can be a less formal setting than in the living

room. Participants in a conversation sit closer together and this can enhance the

communication.

Quite a few members, especially females, indicated that it was important to them

for elders to be open about their own experiences and share their own "vulnerabilities."

As one put it, "I always appreciated it when elders could relate to my situations with their

past experiences and struggles."

Sharing stories of personal struggles should be done with caution. Just because

such an approach may work well with some members does not mean it will work well

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[339] Nederveen, "Life under the Umbrella of Promise," 160.

with all. There were also critical comments about "sharing." For example, a male in the 46 or older age group indicated that his worst experiences with the work of elders included "elders who talk about themselves and their plans." A female member wrote that her "worst experiences" with the work of elders are when "you bring up a concern and they start talking about a similar experience they had and are not focusing on you."

Worst Experiences of the Work of Elders

Criticism may be hard to listen to, but it can be upbuilding. For this reason, respondents were invited by means of question 34 of the Survey to describe their "worst experiences of the work of elders." Before reading about the various shortcomings noted by congregation members, it should be remembered that by and large there is much appreciation for the work of elders. Many members did not list any "worst experiences" and a number of them spelled out why this was so. As one put it, "I don't have any. They are trying their best; also the young elders."

They were Unprepared

People have certain expectations for a home visit. If elders do not think about how to make a visit as effective as possible, it may not amount to much more than a social call and get noted among the "worst experiences" of the work of elders. One member complained about "a home visit where little time was spent on spiritual matters. An elder that did not recognize his office as a task given by God, and therefore did not do his work with respect for that office."

Members also rightly expect elders to have a certain level of knowledge. After all, they must be "able to teach" (1 Ti 3:2). One member expressed disappointment in an elder who was apparently reluctant to comment on another church's "teachings and

activities with doctrine, because there is so much to learn about our doctrine, it would take a lifetime to know it." Such a response is below the level at which an elder should interact when invited to express an opinion.

They Showed no Personal Interest

When there is only contact during annual home visits, this can easily be interpreted as a lack of interest on the part of the elder. This is especially the case with female members, who value informal contacts. When there is no informal contact, other contact can come across in the wrong way. As a result, one young woman noted that it was one of her worst experiences that she was only approached "when absent from the Lord's Supper." Another woman also remarked "that they only talk at home visits and otherwise not show empathy or concern about us."

Home visits should be a highlight for elders and congregation members. If elders only visit out of a sense of duty, members will be quick to sense this. A respondent evidently interpreted things in this way, writing about a "lack of interest in your problem and no follow-up visits." The individual who mentioned this displayed an open attitude in response to other questions, but evidently felt disappointed that a problem shared was not taken seriously. Similar complaints were voiced by others as well.

Because Reformed elders are males, they could feel somewhat hesitant to maintain contact with members of the opposite sex. Not surprisingly, various female members complained about "being ignored." One commented that "at church, elders won't even look at you. They should greet you and show that you're welcome." This suggestion was also voiced by another.

When there is a death in the family, even when the family member who has died is far away, immediate attention is often appreciated very much. One member whose mother passed away was very disappointed that an elder did not come that evening to visit. Support that does not come when it is needed or that comes late can easily lead to a feeling of estrangement. A few examples can serve to illustrate this. Members complained about "lack of communication" and not being visited during difficult times. Along the same lines another member mentioned having a family member who had been diagnosed with a serious illness. This person was not contacted by the elder until "months later after first diagnosis and just because we were standing together and had some conversation." Another passed on the request: "If there is a sickness or death in the family, please do not work the visit into the actual home visit."

Members appreciate it when elders devote some personal time and attention to them. This involves more than "a 'welcome' visit in the church parking lot," as experienced by one member. If more attention is not given, it is not surprising when members comment that the elders sometimes "hardly know who you are or what situation you or your family is in."

Their Communication Skills were Deficient

Beginning with small talk is important to smooth the way for deeper interaction. However, it should not last too long. Apparently this is sometimes the case, leading members to categorize such visits among their "worst experiences with the work of elders." The time for a visit is limited and thought should be given to having enough room left for dealing with substantial issues.

Elders should, however, do what they can to avoid a rigid approach when visiting. One member complained that an elder said, "Let's get started so we can get through this list of questions tonight!" Similarly, another wrote that "when questions or statements are merely technical… matters of the heart do not come up and the visit is not edifying." If questions are asked, they should open the way to discussion. As one respondent remarked, "Trying to see what lives in the heart is not a matter of answering questions and being told that it is not the correct answer."

It is important for elders to show they are really listening. One respondent, for example, mentioned the case of "an elder who didn't know me, started talking when he came in and never stop until he left." More examples could be given of elders launching into monologues and failing to take time to get to know the people being visited. Pr 18:13 comes to mind here: "He who answers before listening— that is his folly and his shame."

There are issues where there can be room for discussion and disagreement. "Worst experiences" take place when elders display "lack of understanding" and "personal prejudices" or argue about "non-essential items." The promotion of personal preferences is not consistent with the attitude that a servant of Jesus Christ should display. One could add to this that if elders disagree with a member, they should try to make it clear that they are listening. It can be helpful, for example, to summarize a member's position before interacting with it in a Scriptural way. If the topic is not worth pursuing further, the conversation should then be directed to other matters.

They Lacked Sensitivity

"We are free to talk of our own accord because of our desire to do so but find communication with the elders difficult—very condescending, very misunderstood."

Such a comment points to a possible lack of humility on the part of certain elders as well as a failure to show they are doing their utmost to understand the issues that members are wrestling with.

Being sensitive to circumstances is important. One member expressed dissatisfaction at "abrupt responses to questions or problems with little or no discussion." Displaying a receptive, listening attitude instead of taking what a respondent called a "black or white" approach to a situation can do much to prevent a visit from being catalogued as one of the "worst experiences."

When visiting, elders should try to divide their attention among family members during a visit. One mother complained that "during the last home visit of three hours, the elders talked to me for five minutes. They talked to my kids and spouse the rest of the time." It was no surprise to note that her response to question 16 indicated that the elders were only "slightly" successful in getting her to talk about her walk with God.

Even if elders have a particular concern they wish to address during an annual home visit, they should be careful not to make that the only focal point in a discussion. One younger member, for example, complained about only being addressed in regard to financial contributions. While that may be an issue worth bringing up, it may be only a symptom of deeper problems. A wider ranging discussion would be needed to address what could be many reasons for concern.

Elders should show sensitivity in helping members to deal with situations that affect them deeply on an emotional level. One member still recalled as one of his "worst experiences with the work of elders" how his wife's miscarriage was dealt with almost two decades earlier. Elders do well to realize that by insensitivity, they can compound the

grief someone goes through. When linked with traumatic events, such insensitivity can be remembered for years afterward.

During conversations, it is good to keep an eye on how the other person is reacting. There may be verbal or nonverbal cues indicating it is time to move on to another topic or round off the discussion. Otherwise even with the best of intentions it may still not be upbuilding. A member verbalized this as follows: "One elder was trying to encourage, but talked so long that I felt belittled. He was right, but I had to humbly listen. He was enthusiastic, but overwhelmed me."

It is also important to realize that there is a time and a place for bringing up topics for discussion. A member expressed dismay that elders criticized her husband "at about 10:30 p.m. about an issue." Another listed as one of her worst experiences "the discussion of a personal topic in a public place." Another member made it clear that if an admonition needs to be given, it should be done in person rather than by telephone. As a rule, this is a good remark to keep in mind. However, in all fairness it should also be remembered that not everything can be planned in a formal way. Sometimes things come up during telephone conversations that call for an immediate response.

Especially when admonitions are given during a discussion, it can be difficult to know how to round things off in an appropriate way. At such a time, sensitivity is very important and there will be no appreciation for what one member characterized as "'joking' comments made after a home visit that hurt!"

They were Judgmental

Another complaint voiced in various ways was that some elders were judgmental. One female member described one of her worst experiences with the work of elders as

having happened when they came to her with rumours, accepting them as truth. Others also gave similar comments about accusations "without proper info" and failing to listen to both parties. Being judgmental can take many forms. A member wrote about elders "jumping to conclusions, thinking they know how me/my kids feel or should feel."

There are also times when an elder needs to refrain from expressing a judgment in the interest of addressing (other) needs of a member adequately. One respondent complained that the elders spent the entire home visit not visiting as such, but discussing something the parents of this member had done and why they thought it was wrong.

There was no Follow-up

One member expressed her disappointment, indicating that it was one of her worst experiences with the work of elders when "they said they would come to talk about an issue but did not come!" Others: "There was a situation that was serious and the issue was swept under the rug." "Sometimes they don't listen or they listen and do nothing." One parent noticed no response after children described difficulties in connection with the Young Peoples' Society. She wrote: "Show up, find out what they're talking about."

It is important for members to know that concerns they bring forward will be discussed. At the same time it is important to make it clear to them that raising concerns or making suggestions does not automatically imply that a positive response according to their wishes will be forthcoming.

Follow-up afterwards shows sustained interest and the desire to help where possible. This could require paying another visit to discuss problems. In other cases, follow-up involves relaying a suggestion or request to council or consistory. When this happens, it is helpful if the outcome is communicated back to the congregation member.

Otherwise irritation will build up, as was evident from one comment that the effectiveness of the work of elders would be increased by "knowing that the concerns you bring up are actually being dealt with." Feedback can do much to help eliminate possible sources of frustration.

There was a Breach of Confidentiality

There were repeated comments that confidentiality had been breached. One respondent commented, "Our particular ward elder shared things with us about other members by name, so we aren't so sure he doesn't use us as examples for others." Another mentioned "hearing about something that was discussed in the visit by someone who was not in the consistory."

Elders who breach confidentiality seriously undermine their own work and potentially also that of other office bearers. Once confidentiality is breached by one elder, the trust members could have in any elder can be shattered permanently. That was the effect with at least one respondent. Rather than trusting the elders unconditionally, others conclude that "it depends on the person."

Elders may be trustworthy, but they need to know that various members have reservations about their wives. Apparently some wives come to know information that they are unable to keep to themselves. This undermines the work of elders.

There will be little or no open communication if members cannot trust elders to maintain confidentiality in regard to private information that is brought to their attention. It is therefore good to be aware of how to gain the trust of congregation members and how to keep it. The responses to question 29 about confidentiality show that not everyone is sure what they tell elders will stay with the elders. However, it is also evident that if

members feel they have "enough" informal contact with their elder they are much more likely to trust that he will keep information confidential.[340] The extra care that the elder shows enhances his credibility, thereby increasing the potential for open and helpful conversations. Conversely, about 31% of those who indicate that the amount of informal contact with their elders is not enough are also not prepared to trust that he will keep information confidential.

The longer a person has been a member somewhere, the greater the chance that he or she may trust an elder. But this correlation is not as strong as when the elder makes a special point of contacting the members of his ward informally during the course of a year. This means that an elder cannot simply count on years of acquaintance automatically leading to a relationship of trust, but should make a point of devoting extra personal attention to those in his ward.

Those who have served as an office bearer themselves have a somewhat higher level of trust that their elders will keep things confidential. Such trust is undoubtedly based on the experience that restraint will be exercised in any discussions that take place at consistory when the elders meet to discuss the pastoral care of the congregation.

Looking Ahead

Many welcomed the opportunity to respond to question 35: "What can be done to increase the effectiveness of the work of elders so they can do their work in a way that honours God, is faithful to his Word, and benefits the members of the congregation being served, including you?" Their thoughts are grouped together with suggestions for improvement made in response to other questions.

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[340] See Appendix Four under the heading "Confidentiality."

Mutual Support

It is good to note that members understand the need to be realistic. While they pray for the elders and encourage them in their work, they know that "we cannot erase all grief and misery in someone's life. Elders should support and advise someone with special cares and needs. But again, we should not depend on them as being able to solve all problems. Some Christian advice in certain circumstances can be very helpful and prevent a lot of grief."

Indeed, elders cannot solve all problems. They can, however, work with the conviction that "a church is meant to be a living body, a true 'communion of saints.'" In this connection, they should encourage the process of building one another up. As one member wrote: "Everyone must understand that we are together to help each other." Elders can play a role in facilitating the development of helping relationships between members who struggle and those who have struggled with certain problems and have learned to deal with them.

Preparation to Work with the Word

Members also mentioned the importance of having "more preaching/teaching about the scriptural basis for 'eldership' (i.e. offices) in church." This would include instructing the congregation "to choose men as elders who conform to the Biblical guidelines." Respondents also expressed the desire to hear preaching that empowers elders by providing them with "back up" for "what they must do and say."

No one is perfect. This also applies to elders. Nevertheless, as a member phrased it, they "need to be seen by the congregation as placed there by God." For this reason, congregation members should be reminded that obedience to the fifth commandment

includes having "patience with their weaknesses and shortcomings."[341] Along these lines, it was also stressed that the effectiveness of the work of elders would be increased by teaching the congregation "to accept elders as they are" and to "encourage the congregations to work with the elders."

Respondents also emphasized that elders "must do a lot of self-examination and study God's Word." Their effectiveness "will increase if they increase in knowledge, wisdom, (and) gifts of the Spirit." Then they will be able to work with the Word more fruitfully when addressing issues in the lives of congregation members.

The need for training elders in communication skills was also mentioned. This could include group discussions on their tasks. In this regard, one referred to Pr 27:17, "iron sharpens iron." Study materials, videos, seminars and conferences can also be used to offer help in developing listening abilities, how to ask questions, and how to counsel people. One urged: "Teach them some biblical counseling! And when to refer to whom." Another: "Continue to offer office bearers workshops with case studies." But there was also a word of caution: "We have to be careful though as these all take time as well."

A respondent also listed various topics such as "divorce / marital problems or alcohol and drug abuse / mixed courtships / leaving the church (this is a growing concern)" and wrote that elders could also "suggest topics that they need help with." An older female member verbalized another issue that is a recurring theme among many of the women, especially in the middle-aged or older category: "More men should be schooled in how to deal with emotional problems."

Some stressed that training should not be deferred until men become elders. There was also the suggestion that elders should be involved in training all men in the

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[341] Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 104, *Book of Praise,* 521.

congregation to see the importance of headship, thereby preparing them for leadership. A member observed: "We put a lot of emphasis on training for the ministry. Some of this effort should be put into elder training." To accomplish this, another member suggested, "The minister should do less of the actual work and spend more time in practical training of elders so they are equipped to do the work." However, it is perhaps also possible for this goal to be achieved by "more visits with an elder and minister as opposed to two elders."

It is an excellent idea for ministers to be involved in regular home visits. This puts them more closely in touch with what is going on in the lives of average congregation members. However, the size of congregations in the Canadian Reformed Churches can be an obstacle. In congregations that have 250 or more members, ministers are often already quite busy with other tasks, such as visiting the elderly and the sick, sometimes teaching extra classes, or accompanying elders on special visits. Next to this, ministers also have responsibilities beyond the local congregation, serving the broader church federation in various ways. The only way to increase available time for visiting members in their homes would be to decrease the preaching load, since the preparation of sermons occupies a good deal of time on a weekly basis.[342] This could be accomplished by more regular pulpit exchanges between ministers, but congregations generally have a preference to hear their own minister as much as possible.

Set a Good Example

"Elders should be examples in lifestyle," commented one member. It is troubling if members see a "contradiction between walk and talk." If elders want members to

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[342] Aside from pulpit exchanges and vacations, ministers in the Canadian Reformed Churches usually preach two different sermons each Sunday.

attend certain meetings or other events, they should try to be there themselves too. Often during coffee breaks or after the meeting there are opportunities to interact with people in the congregation. Such contacts if used effectively can be fruitful with a view to pastoral care.

The importance of humility on the part of elders was also emphasized. This includes being "able to say 'I'm sorry' or 'I apologize' when they make mistakes." Next to this, gentleness was mentioned as an essential element in dealing with the sheep of the flock, especially when they are hurting. As one lonely single member put it, "I've appreciated elders who visit with the purpose to gently spur on and encourage. They are also real and understand life has many struggles." When church leaders model gentleness, they also cultivate such a spirit among the members.

There were also other worthwhile remarks. "Remain sympathetic and open-minded." "Do not minimize the problems of others or tell people that their problems are their own fault." In leading people to spiritual maturity, "some need a lot of encouragement to make small steps towards (the) final goal; not just to hear 'this is how it goes' period."

Suggestions for Improving Communication

To improve communication many stressed the importance of prayer. "Before the visit, pray the Lord if he will open our hearts and minds so that we can have a good visit." This is something that can be brought forward in a sermon by a minister to prepare people for the home visit season. At the beginning of their visit with congregation members elders can also pray for open discussion.

A few comments need to be made to put things into perspective. Skill on the part of elders does not guarantee that there will be open conversation. Regardless of efforts on the part of the elders, some people experience difficulty in relating to anyone and are not inclined to share their problems with others. As one member put it, "I'm not very open to begin with." If there is no open conversation this can therefore not necessarily be blamed on the elders.

What can be done to promote open communication? Respondents are quite willing to give pointers as to how elders could interact with them in a fruitful way. They indicate that it "makes a difference" which elder visits them. One middle-aged male member noted: "Some are more approachable than others." This is an issue that elders can work on.

Respondents realize that all the initiative does not have to come from the side of the elder. There is an aspect of mutuality. "Some do very well, others not; but it is not a one-way street," commented one respondent. "When you notice an elder struggling with communication you can 'give without being asked.'" As another member put it, there will be more openness if the elder and the member work on "building a stronger relationship together."

Make Informal Contacts Count

Nederveen points out, "The purpose of visiting is to build a relationship of trust so that people can and will confide in the pastoral caregiver (pro-active), rather than to show one's face when there is a need (reactive). Pro-active visiting takes more than one or two visits in a year."[343] When elders find that they have not had an "open" conversation with a member during an annual home visit, they therefore need to reflect

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[343] Nederveen, "Life under the Umbrella of Promise," 168.

on how much contact they have had previously with this member. One member explained that "in a brief one-hour visit a year it is somewhat difficult to discuss your walk with God with someone you haven't developed a relationship with."

When elders do not invest time to get to know people and develop a relationship of trust, the returns will be meagre to mediocre. Minimal contacts will affect the quality of interaction. Elders should therefore not have high expectations if they have not made an effort to get to know the members in their wards before the annual home visit. As one member put it, "A 1½ hour visit doesn't cut it." A sister in the 26 to 35 years old age bracket commented: "Sometimes an elder speaks to me so infrequently that he barely knows my name. Then when he comes for a home visit it seems like I'm talking to a stranger. I am usually somewhat guarded in my speaking because of this. I won't talk about most of my concerns/struggles." This was not an isolated observation.

Even brief informal contacts help smooth the way for deeper conversation later. This will help elders to learn basic things such as the names of the members they are visiting, their ages, their work or studies, their interests and abilities, and what their daily life is like. As one member wrote, "this will then open up a way to be more open and personal." Members explained: "It makes it easier to have conversations. Especially for our children." It "develops a more personal and meaningful bond." "A relationship has to be established before you would entrust your problems to someone."

Question 15 of the Survey of Elders was intended to establish how often elders deliberately seek contact with congregation members. The results are encouraging. Half

of the elders try to maintain contact in one way or another three or four times a year. Some do this even more often. In other cases, the frequency is lower or varies.[344]

The data provided by the respondents makes it clear that a higher frequency of contact definitely contributes to more open discussion. However, maintaining informal contact five or more times a year can be a challenge for many elders. It is important to note that when this happens, it is appreciated, but it is not always necessary. Other members indicated that their elder stayed in touch once or twice a year and that did not seem to be a major issue with them. One wrote that there was extra contact in connection with "special matters," stressing, "That's when it matters and that's when it happens too!"

If an elder does not have much time to maintain contacts, he should in any case "be there" when it counts, such as when there is a crisis. Knowing that the elder comes at such times leads to a greater degree of openness at other times. The other percentages show that a decrease in openness correlates with a lower frequency of contact.

Not everyone wants more informal contact with their elders. One member, who noted never or almost never having contact with an elder also added the comment: "and that is how it is preferred." However, such a response is an exception. Many respondents do not feel comfortable sharing with someone with whom they have no relationship.

Friendly greetings help in smoothing the way for further contact, but that is not enough in the eyes of every member. A familiar pattern emerged again where a sister in the 36 to 45 years old age bracket indicated the need for more personal informal contact to foster openness. "Talk one-on-one with couples also—not always husband-wife

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[344] See Appendix Four under the heading "Make Informal Contacts Count."

together, but separately also." Such informal contacts are especially important to women in the congregation.

Since the elders are men, they tend to direct themselves to the male heads of families more than to the spouses. They may also at times feel awkward about speaking to a woman outside of the family context and sometimes struggle with the question how to interact with members of the opposite sex who need pastoral care. The annual home visit is conducted together with another elder, which alleviates potential concerns about inappropriate contact. But the question remains how to deal further with single women or with women who need individual attention.

Various female members expressed the need for "one-on-one chats." This, of course, raises the question of propriety. Elders need to be on guard against temptation and also the perception of impropriety in their visits. However, perhaps one way of addressing the desire for more personal contact could be either by having a chat after a church service or other meeting in a public area or else to make a phone call.

Especially if a female member is struggling with marital difficulties, one-on-one contact with an elder could easily lead to other problems. In such situations, it would be preferable for elders simply to ask questions about the marital relationship in the presence of both parties during a home visit. It should not be difficult to sense if there is any hesitation on the part of either husband or wife when answering such questions. If women have difficulty opening up, elders can also consider solving this by taking their wives along on an informal visit. Having an extra woman in the room can help female members who are being visited to feel more at ease.

A relatively young single sister affirmed the importance of informal contacts, pointing out that her elder "cares about my life beyond church and has actively helped me and had me over on Sundays." Having such a member over on Sundays in a family setting is also a way of showing personal interest and developing a caring relationship without the unacceptable risks that could be involved in having a one-on-one visit.

Despite the fact that many people converse with each other through email or instant messaging these days, this is not a well-liked medium for serious conversations with an office bearer. One respondent commented: "It depends on what is to be communicated. It is not easy to discuss issues by e-mail but to make an appointment by e-mail would be fine."

Those who responded that their informal contacts were enough made it clear that they knew their elder and were convinced he would come if they called him. "He is there when you need him." There was also the recognition that an elder's time is limited, so they were not unreasonable in their expectations. Various members expressed themselves along these lines: "If I want to talk to him I will. I would not expect him to initiate all contact."

Continuity in the contacts during the years also helps. For this reason, it is to be recommended that if at all possible, members be kept in the same ward as much as possible. If an elder is chosen for another term, it is preferable for him to become the elder of the same ward as previously.

Show Genuine Interest and Compassion

Various respondents stressed that taking time for them is a demonstration of love. One noted that "the worst thing is that elders sometimes seem to have no time for their

visits. The office is a very high calling but some elders seem to handle the office as a duty... performed out of obligation but not out of genuine love." According to another respondent, "It's hard to express personal feelings and struggles to an elder who doesn't show full understanding/ compassion." Quite a few members expressed the need for contact with elders who are genuinely interested in their well-being.

A number of respondents felt that elders could engage in more "small talk," but not everyone agreed with this. One sister remarked: "some talk too much with small talk." Another respondent remarked with a view to the elders: "If you're not interested in what's going on, don't give me petty contact." Someone else wrote pointedly: "Show interest in our lives and children's lives!" Members need to have the sense that the elder really cares about them and is willing to interact with them at deeper levels.

It takes time and effort to show interest and develop an atmosphere of trust. As one member put it, "it's hard to talk to anyone at first. You need to feel comfortable." It is therefore important to be relaxed and not rushed when visiting members. They do not want to stand in the way of the elders. As a result, a potentially open attitude can quickly diminish as evidenced by one comment: "Sometimes the visits feel hurried, or you give answers they want to hear so they can get to the next visit." Once a bond has been established people will be more ready to open up to elders, "realizing they are there to help and more than willing to help."

Both what is discussed and how the discussion takes place are important. One member wrote about the difficulty of "getting over my own sinful nature about being concerned about what others will think over me and my sins." Such members need a listening ear and encouragement if they are struggling to discuss spiritual problems.

Showing genuine interest involves taking what people say seriously. Younger members brought this forward repeatedly, but they were not the only ones. Something may not seem important to an elder, but if it is brought forward by a member it should not be dealt with in a dismissive way. One female respondent complained: "I tried to talk about a serious matter but I was not believed." A remark made in response to a subsequent question pointed in the direction of a dysfunctional marriage.

Ask Appropriate Questions

Asking questions is not always easy for elders. A respondent noted a visit "when the elders could not seem to get past the mundane topics of daily life to a real conversation about spiritual life." Another member explained that some elders "seem to have difficulty on a personal level. General talk about doctrine is easier, but speaking about a personal walk with God more difficult."

One member appreciated direct questions about "struggles in our walk (with God)" and "joy in our walk with Him." However, it should be remembered that people are not all the same and some are not comfortable with a direct approach. Some mentioned that if elders ask direct questions, it is helpful if this is done in a "tactful" or "proper" way.

One respondent stressed that elders should ask relevant questions and upon receiving an answer, pose further questions in order to probe a little further, but without prying. As one respondent put it, "Some elders make me feel funny—like I need to give a specific answer to a question—and I know what they want to hear—but I don't always feel I live up to what I say I believe so I don't like specific questions."

Using "open-ended questions" (i.e. questions that cannot be answered by a simple "yes" or "no") is often a better way to encourage discussion. This can involve having to wait for someone to think through an answer before responding. A member commented: "Quiet time is OK; that's when God speaks too." Whatever approach is taken, elders need to consider whether it is appropriate and in tune with the character and needs of the member they are visiting.

Connect with the Children

Parents often emphasized the need for elders to be trained in communication skills, especially with a view to different age groups. As another member put it, "Then the children would trust their advice and turn to them in times of need."

Many parents indicate that some children are bashful, while others are "more willing to talk." The elder should therefore not necessarily be held responsible if open communication does not take place. Nevertheless, parents felt that certain approaches were helpful and others were not. Numerous comments were given to explain this. These comments are valuable for more than one reason. Elders can benefit from them when interacting with the children, but also when dealing with the parents.

Whoever wants to communicate well with children will need to take the necessary time to get to know them. As one parent pointed out, in larger families a one and a half hour visit is not enough time to deal with all of the children. Time constraints are a factor that can make effective interaction with children difficult.

Since children are members of the flock that need shepherding, ways to relate to them need to be explored. "No amount of 'preparing' on the parent/child part will replace an elder who has truly managed to get to know the sheep in his ward." This involves

paying attention to children not only at home visits but also when meeting them during the week and at church. For example, visit Young Peoples' Society or other youth events. Such an approach is echoed by a younger communicant member who noted that informal contact "helps to get to know the elder on a less formal and fun basis." This same member suggested that the work of the elders would become more effective by having more "ward evenings." Take a moment, "even if there is only time for a 'Hi—How's it going?'" Show genuine interest in them.

One mother pointed out that children will not feel very special if certain basic facts are unknown to the elder, causing them to "respond poorly as a result." A member who is now in the 26 to 35 years old age bracket commented on her worst experiences with the work of elders: "When I was young (still at home), the elders never knew my name or how old I was." Knowing such basic facts before the visit, as well as what grade they are in, or what college or university they attend, or what their job is are important. Try to find out about their hobbies, their musical tastes, which books or magazines they like reading.

Question 16 of the Survey of Elders invited the elders to reflect on the question "If children in your ward have graduated from high school, do you usually know what they are doing now and how things are going?" The results, which can be found in the next table, show that there is room for improvement.

Table 14. Knowledge of those who have graduated

	R1	R2	C1	C2	N
Yes	1	3	4	3	11
Sometimes	5	3	1	3	12
No	1	0	0	0	1
Not applicable	0	1	0	1	2
Number of Respondents (elders)	**7**	**7**	**5**	**7**	**26**

Aside from speaking to the children directly, it is also good from time to time to "ask the parents about their children, be specific, i.e. get to know the whole family." Such information can help an elder to know how to approach the children. One mother, for example, wrote that her older children who are still single "feel neglected at times because they do not fit in the 'norm' which is marriage and children."

How should contact take place? For starters, as some children verbalized it through their parents, use "normal language." "Have a more relaxed visit, so we feel more comfy with them." They also explained in relation to the annual home visit: "Don't wear such fancy clothes; they're intimidating." Respondents also mentioned the importance of "eye contact."

Further suggestions worth pondering are: Begin with "short friendly conversation upon entering and continue while sitting down. Do Scripture and prayer at a lull, because that's when it becomes stilted. Bible reading should be natural, not a stop/start place." "Talk about regular real-life things first and build bridges/relationships. Otherwise the elder becomes the distant man that only talks about the Bible... 'he doesn't really have interest for me...'" "Talk to them directly," and not just to the parents. Take the children seriously. "Listen to what they have to say." "Don't put kids down."

Parents made other practical remarks as well in regard to the involvement of children in home visits. "Children should be in bed at a young age," "the 15+ youth should get more attention than the younger ones," and they should "listen and sit with mom/dad and elders with some questions/answers." A parent also stressed "I'd like our elders to listen to our children (all teenagers now!) without being condescending or

assuming they have all the answers." Consider visiting older teenagers without the parents present. This "may encourage them to be more open with the elders."

Elders need to use a style of interaction that encourages dialogue. A parent observed that elders sometimes raise the questions "in such a way that they have answered their questions by the time they are asking for a response." An elder should also avoid simply asking "knowledge-based questions." It is better to ask open-ended questions, "not ones that can be answered yes or no."

Questions should be clear enough to be understood. One respondent commented: "We find that a lot of elders have a habit of asking 'trick questions.' They should come right out and ask what they want to know." One parent suggested: "When a child does not know the answer, don't wait and wait for an answer. Try asking it in simpler terms."

Parents stressed the importance of asking appropriate questions and offered various suggestions for improvement. Try to be more relevant to their individual circumstances. The children of one member suggested: "Be interested in our everyday activities too, not just 'church questions.'" Members also suggested that elders can help the children to see that not only things like "prayer and Bible reading" but also other activities can be "to God's glory." "So have them talk about what and how they do things. Not just Catechism or church."

The elders can talk about non-related issues like school or hobbies to put the child(ren) at ease. It is helpful if an elder knows what is being covered at school the week of the home visit, but he should not restrict himself to that. One member stressed, however, that although it may be important to ask how things are at school, that doesn't necessarily help children to talk about their faith.

One respondent offered various suggestions for improving spiritual communication between children and the elders. Children between eight to 12 years of age could be asked questions like: "What are you reading in the Bible right now?" "What is first in your life?" "How do you experience God's presence in your life?" "Do you feel forgiven after you pray when you've done something wrong?" For children between the ages of 12 and 18 years old, further questions could be asked, such as: "Do you do devotions by yourself? How do you prepare for Young Peoples Society / Catechism classes?" "What do you like to do with your friends / in your time off?" "Do you have friends in the church / school? Do they help you grow spiritually?" "How do the sermons / Catechism classes / Young Peoples Society help you grow?" "Do you find it hard to pray?" "What kind of music do you like?"

Elders should be careful how they deal with matters that come up for discussion. According to one respondent, "sometimes elders leave an impression of being 'nosy,' asking if they have a boyfriend, etc. (which is okay in itself), but then fail to follow up the questions in a caring and Christian manner."

Communicating well is not only a matter of asking questions. It is also possible to give children "some comments which they can react to." Whatever the responses may be, there should also be "patience with answers given."

Practical impediments were mentioned by various parents. Some felt, for example that their children would speak more freely if the parents were not present. Others felt that "Either the elder has no/very little connection with my children, or too much (e.g., their teacher), so either way, it seems to become a bit like a formality."

Know When to Speak and When to Listen

In response to question 23 of the Survey, a member gave the following comment about elders. "Some feel inclined to simply instruct without listening to concerns. Others hear concerns but simply give traditional, predetermined answers without carefully considering the concerns. Others don't seem to have the ability to understand the concerns at all and simply go on with their agenda." This illustrates how important it is that elders should be not only "able to teach" (1 Ti 3:2), but also able to listen. A failure to do this will undermine the effectiveness of any visits.

For many respondents, it is very important to know that "the elder is available and willing to listen." Within that framework, words of Scriptural wisdom expressed in a humble way are appreciated very much. It is easier for members to be open if they see that an elder is truly doing his best to understand them, listening well and exercising restraint in talking.

In response to question 23, members gave varying assessments in regard to how much the elders usually talked. An overview of their answers can be found in the next table.

Table 15. The elders usually talk...

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Enough	86.4	88.1	80.4	94.6	87.5	223
Not enough	0.0	1.2	5.4	0.0	1.6	4
Too much	10.2	6.0	10.7	5.4	7.8	20
It depends on the elder	3.4	4.8	3.6	0.0	3.1	8
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	59	84	56	56		255

Since members do not necessarily have the same elders from year to year it is not surprising that some commented that it depends on the elder. As one put it, "Elders have room to learn here. They cannot learn about me as they are talking." Another expressed a

sentiment shared by several respondents: "Home visits occasionally feel like a lesson or lecture." Obviously in such cases the elders were not listening enough.

A brother who has served as an elder remarked: "The purpose of the visit is to find out what lives in the home. You only truly find out by 'prompting/facilitating' a discussion and then listening." That is indeed a way to begin. Listening can then go hand in hand with talking. However, even if someone expresses the opinion that elders talk "enough" and not "too much," this does not necessarily mean that all is well. According to one individual, the elders talk "enough, but too general after a few remarks have been made about the theme/and/passage read."

There are questions that elders would like to have answers to. However they also need to be sensitive to what members want to talk about. One complaint was that "they are more concerned with whether we read the Bible, pray, etc. and whether our children know their Bible/Catechism than whether we are happy with the state of the congregation." This remark was made by someone who feels "very disconnected" and who has served as an office bearer in the past.

Listening is a Skill

Communication is a two-way street. This is especially important when dealing with immigrants. As one put it, it would help to be more open, "when the elder understanding me correctly." The grammatical error in this remark highlights that communication can be a challenge and that elders need to be aware of potential obstacles in the process. To eliminate possible misunderstanding, it can be helpful to rephrase what people say periodically, especially if it is not clear how a statement should be interpreted. This also serves to reassure the person who is talking that the elder is listening.

Making clear efforts to understand people inspires trust on their part. This is especially important with initial contacts when an elder does not yet know a member very well. As one respondent put it, "having one good experience/reaction when voicing an issue makes it feel more comfortable." That helps to be open about other matters.

In many cases, respondents were satisfied about the listening skills of the elders. The overall results in response to question 24 of the Survey ("You find that during the annual home visit elders usually listen...") were encouraging.

Table 16. The elders usually listen...

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Well	51.7	61.2	45.8	57.6	54.8	144
Reasonably well	33.3	36.5	47.5	42.4	39.5	104
Not enough	10.0	1.2	6.8	0.0	4.2	11
It depends on the elder	5.0	1.2	0.0	0.0	1.5	4
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	60	85	59	59		263

Those who felt there was room for improvement stressed the need for training the elders to listen better. This involves "actually listening—not just giving the answer to a question." It also involves listening sympathetically and responding with a humble heart. Listening well is ultimately the key to moving on into an edifying conversation. Then it will be easier to know what to say and how and when to say it. It is the quality of what they say and not the quantity that counts. "What they say is more important than how much." Openness about problems is easier when an elder is not "judgmental," and if the member notices that they will "listen all the way before they start thinking of what to say." If someone needs correction, this should be done gently (Gal 6:1).

Experience is an asset

Elders are expected to have a combination of knowledge and experience. Members made it clear that knowing that someone has life experience helps them open

up about issues they are facing. In some cases, when men are chosen at a relatively young age to become elders, experience may be lacking. This is a problem that should diminish as time goes by. It can be somewhat compensated for by making a special point of listening well in order to understand better what people are trying to communicate.

It helps if the "elder shows wisdom, openness, and ability to listen without coming up with trite answers and immediate 'biblical' solutions." Members therefore appreciate it if an elder is either "educated (or willing to be educated)" in a given problem area before venturing an opinion. If elders are not sure how to deal with an issue, they should not try to come up with an answer anyway, but promise to get back to the members with advice later. This gives the opportunity to study the matter further prayerfully. It is also possible to discuss certain problems with other elders or with the minister. If a member requests this, it is also possible to ask the minister to come along on a visit. That is one of the advantages of "plural leadership" in Reformed churches.

Another factor to keep in mind is that members are inclined to prefer dealing with an elder who has experience in dealing with them in particular. Lack of continuity in ministering to someone's needs can cause frustration if a person's difficulties need to be retold. As one member noted, it is helpful if an elder has "someone else with that knows what is going on."

Continuity is not always an asset. One respondent indicated that "it's hard to be open with an elder who has his own strong opinions." If certain members find it hard to connect with a particular elder, having a different elder can then be beneficial. For this reason, it can be a relief for some members that terms of service are generally limited to

three years. In situations where compatibility is a serious problem, the elders should

consider switching a member or a family to another ward.

Questions Members Hope Elders Will Ask

Elders are rightly expected to take the initiative in leading discussions and also to

interact with what members bring forward. They devote attention to a variety of topics

during their visits. In some cases, members may feel that issues they struggle with have

been addressed sufficiently. However, apparently not everyone feels this is the case.

Question 32 of the Survey of Individual Communicant Members was: "What sort of

problems do you have that you would wish an elder would ask you about or create an

opportunity to talk about?" Various respondents offered suggestions. The summary

below gives an overview of the more focused, personal approach that at least some would

like to see during visits. Many elders who read this may feel they have learned nothing

new. Others may see reason to fine-tune their approach.

Personal Issues

One member expressed the wish that an elder would either ask about or create an

opportunity to talk about "the cares of life in general." This can include a variety of

subjects. Underlying various comments is the desire for a discussion about "genuine

struggles that go past the surface." This is also reflected in the study done by G.

Nederveen, who focused in particular on elderly members in Canadian Reformed

Churches. He found that members are also "asking for a listening ear and meaningful

dialogue."[345] His observation pertains to people who are in the evening of their lives, but

it is also valid for members in other age categories. Among those surveyed by Nederveen,

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[345] Nederveen, "Life under the Umbrella of Promise," 153.

61% "expressed a need to talk about death and dying." In view of this fact, he stressed that "ministers, elders, and deacons should also be pro-active in addressing that need."[346]

One item worth reflecting on with a view to having meaningful visits with congregation members is to be sensitive to transitional moments in their lives. Nederveen observed in his study on the elderly that "next to the loss of a spouse, retirement was listed as the second major adjustment in life. The impact of this change in life is generally not so readily acknowledged. In pastoral care we should encourage those who are nearing retirement age to prepare for this new phase in life in order not to be bored or feel bereft of a sense of purpose."[347]

In the responses to the Survey of Individual Communicant Members there was the desire, as one respondent put it, to talk about "spiritual growth—real growth, not just outside adherence to custom (e.g. church attendance x 2)." Another explained that it is not easy to keep God as the "primary focus in all things," since there are so many competing demands of this world. Maintaining "personal, consistent Bible study" was felt to be difficult. Sorting out priorities in general is also a challenge. One wrote that "the everyday issues in life, the regular stressors and busyness of life can weigh a person down. Everyone has this and it would be nice to be encouraged in this."

Others referred to "spiritual problems." Examples of this were struggles with selfishness, or a "secret sin" or other problem involving a lack of self-control and a corresponding desire to be held accountable. People also wrote about having a "lack of assurance (at times) about salvation," and "problems of feeling guilty about not living up to our Christian mandate."

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[346] Nederveen, "Life under the Umbrella of Promise," 183.
[347] Nederveen, "Life under the Umbrella of Promise," 195.

It should not be taken for granted that all office bearers are always able to handle spiritual difficulties. As one elder noted, it would be appreciated if a fellow elder would create an opportunity to talk about "how to be lifted in times of doubt." This should not surprise us. Echoing Scripture, the Canons of Dort remind us "that believers in this life have to struggle with various doubts of the flesh and, placed under severe temptation, do not always feel this full assurance of faith and certainty of perseverance" (Chapter V, Article 11).[348] It is therefore important to create an atmosphere of trust in which congregation members feel safe to share their burdens without being accused of unbelief. Many are willing to talk if the opportunity to do this presents itself and confidentiality is maintained.

People struggle with various issues. We live in a society that highly values various forms of entertainment. Some forms can enhance a person's life; others can be questioned. One parent expressed the wish that an elder would address the matter of "worldly entertainment."

Emotional instability is another problem that members face. "Mental burnout" was mentioned, as well as "depression/anxiety," and struggles with anger. In matters like this, members look to elders for "emotional support" and guidance as well for encouragement to keep trusting in the Lord from day to day when facing the difficulties of life.

Concerns about family life also often surfaced in comments made by respondents. This involves matters such as the role of a husband or a wife. A respondent hoped that the elders would create an opportunity to talk about "how to help my husband be a 'leader' in personal prayer and Bible study in the home." Another indicated that when she was

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[348] *Book of Praise*, 568-569.

younger she would have appreciated it if elder had "asked how I was coping and dealing with my role and difficulties." This is something more wives and mothers wrestle with.

Marital problems are not necessarily something a couple will volunteer to talk about if an elder asks in a general way at the end of a visit if there are issues that the members would like to talk about. Nevertheless, some hope that elders will ask direct questions about this. Elders should not presume that marital stress would only be an issue for someone who is perhaps recently married. Issues relating to this were indicated by women who are approaching middle age or even somewhat older.

It can be difficult for elders and members to discuss such problems if children are present in the room, which is often the case during annual home visits. A possible solution to this is for elders to suggest to families that children attend the first part of the visit. Initial discussion could focus primarily on them and they could be excused after a closing prayer for them. This would then leave room for the elders to continue discussion with the parents at another level on other topics. If more time is needed, a subsequent visit can be arranged.

There may also be other issues in families that are causing stress. "Family-planning" was a concern for one. Parents also expressed the wish to talk about their children. Some have difficulties with parenting. Others hoped that elders would simply ask how their children are doing.

There are also members who experience difficulties in dealing with being single. They may not be the first to speak about their struggles, but will respond when the opportunity is given. One female member, for example, wrote about experiencing

"discontentment" with her role and situation in life and would appreciate counsel in finding how to find "happiness" in the position God gave her.

Members may not necessarily be the first to raise personal concerns, but they do appreciate being asked. One wished that elders would create an opportunity to talk about his work situation, since he is dealing with problems at his place of employment. Others expressed the desire for the elder to broach the topic of financial hardships. Among them one acknowledged "that it is also where family/deacons come in," but wanted help in dealing with the whole matter "in faith (not necessarily practical help)." A male member in the 46 or older age bracket indicated that he would appreciate it if an elder would ask him about his lack of desire to serve in the office. He explained: "I have a huge fear of failure as an office bearer."

Elders also do well to ask about how things are in a person's extended family. This is especially important if they have no direct family in the congregation or nearby. The sickness and death of a parent or other family member can weigh heavily on a person's heart. This can also be the case if it concerns a close friend.

The Communion of Saints

Beyond personal and family concerns, members also expressed concerns about the communion of saints. People can have problems connecting with fellow members. One specifically objected to being told "it is your fault if nobody talks to you." One female member in the 26 to 35 years old age bracket expressed the wish that an elder would give her the opportunity to talk about "fitting in the congregation."

Another member who feels "quite well connected" and is an active church member nevertheless indicated that she wished there would be conversation about the

communion of saints. There was a complaint about "apathy in our church and how scary it is and what we should and can be doing about it," while another wrote about seeing arrogance instead of love and humility. A respondent suggested that it would be helpful if elders would ask "how to improve the church/congregation."

Various members were looking for guidance on how to deal with people in the congregation who are living in sin. Some in particular expressed strong concerns about the lifestyle of certain young adults. Depending on the situation, elders do not necessarily have to be the first to admonish members. However, they certainly have a task in equipping them to follow the procedures outlined by Jesus Christ in Mt 18:15-17 in an orderly way.

It can be tempting to focus on problems with the youth, but as one member put it, elders also do well to discuss "what do we do for young people other than criticizing?" Another respondent mentioned that it would be helpful to discuss involvement in organizing the youth.

The communion of saints is experienced in a special way during worship services. In this connection, the matter of "how we worship in church" is also worth focussing on. Several members pointed this out in their responses on topics they would like to see discussed.

Every member should want to see the communion of saints grow in various ways. Spiritual growth is essential. Numerical growth is also important. This can take place through births in the congregation, but also by reaching out to people outside the church community. Various members made it clear that they would like to have the opportunity to talk about such challenges.

Solicit Questions and Feedback

The effectiveness of the work of elders can be increased by giving them feedback. One respondent commented: "I think this survey is great material for office bearers." Evidently this is a reference to the anticipated responses people would give to the questions. Various members made it clear they appreciated being able to unburden themselves in this way. However, elders can also give members such an opportunity directly.

It is important for elders to make a point of asking members if there is something specific they would like to talk about. Often this is done at the end of a home visit, since elders would rather not have a visit dominated from the outset by matters that could either be controversial or nonessential. If that would happen, it could interfere with fruitful discussion on other matters that are important.

As pointed out by one respondent, instead of asking about possible issues toward the end of a visit, elders could be more proactive. When scheduling a visit with an individual or family they could ask if there is anything that should enter into the discussion. Then they could decide together with whoever is being visited what would be a good time during the visit to focus on those matters.

Elders could also indicate shortly after their arrival that they would like to give an opportunity in the latter part of the visit to discuss any matters brought forward by those being visited. If they wait until they are about to leave before even asking members if there is anything they would still like to talk about, members could conclude that the elders are not really interested in having an extensive discussion. In any case, when

important matters arise at the end of a visit and time is running out, elders should offer to come back.

A respondent also pointed out that aside from soliciting questions, it can be useful for elders to ask for feedback about the visit. This can be done by questions such as: Can you work with what was brought forward? Do you feel that the visit was conducted in a brotherly way? Are you satisfied that what was said was based on Scripture and not merely an expression of personal preferences or opinions? Such questions are especially important if admonitions have been given. An open attitude can do much to defuse tension and disarm opposition.

One of the advantages of paying visits together is that elders have the opportunity to observe each other in action. It is good after a visit to evaluate things together, including brotherly interaction on the way the visit was conducted.

What Church Members Can Do for Elders

Quite a few members responded to question 36: "What do you think you can do to increase the effectiveness of the work of the elders?" It is good to take note of their suggestions.

Spiritual Support

Members made it clear that they understand they have a role to play in regard to the elders. Many affirmed their intention to pray for elders and their families. Others indicated that they wish to honour the elders in their God-given office. This included trying to be more open and to work with the guidance given to them. One also indicated being aware that members can also take the initiative to promote a good relationship with elders: "Invite them and their family for coffee, etc."

Members also realized they need to look beyond the inadequacies of their elders. One commented: "It's very easy to become bitter and negative. This is a struggle for me. I realize it's not all about me. It's about God's glory." It is good to keep that in mind. God makes use of weak, human instruments and he is still at work in the lives of elders as well as in the lives of those being visited.

It was good to see in various comments made by respondents that they see or conclude there are things they can do personally to lighten the burden of the work of the elders. As one put it, "I feel that as a church member I need to do my best to live a holy life. The elders are not there to 'save' me, but I have a personal responsibility to live according to God's Word." Members expressed their commitment to be helpful in different ways: "Be a faithful wife and mother in my own family." "As a mother raise our sons with a proper view of the family and their role in the church." "Be there for others in the congregation." "Be more involved with lonely members, so the elders don't have quite so much to do." One respondent suggested having "groups of members so we can talk about our problems to each other and pray for each other."

Members also verbalized intentions in regard to mutual oversight. "Don't wait for an elder to take care of all discipline and oversight. The job belongs to all of us!" Similarly others indicated the importance of not being "silent bystanders" by saying nothing when another member sins. "Watch out for others, give care and guidance where possible."

Many resolved to be encouraging toward the elders, realizing that this is probably not done enough. This is something they realize they need to convey to each other as well. It is also something which ministers can mention from the pulpit.

Supporting elders spiritually is important, but other avenues can be explored as well. One member wrote: "When the elder feels that he and his family need a break, let us know. We can't tell if you need a meal or a day out with your wife, etc. We are willing to help you, but once again, we don't know what you need if we don't have a relationship / association with you." Another indicated that he sees a task to help elders if time constraints are making it difficult for them to get certain tasks around the house done.

Elders may be reluctant to impose on members, so it is also good to note that one respondent decided to "ask them how they are doing, their families vis á vis their work as elder." Some others made comments in the following vein: "Make an effort to befriend the elder. Help him with his weaknesses." "Provide or suggest books and articles on different issues (depression, etc.)."

Congregation members also expressed the awareness that they need to promote the reputation of the elders. The effectiveness of elders is increased when members "speak well of them to others." One expressed the resolution to work on this at home. "Educate our families what and who elders are and what a home visit is really all about. Be more positive about elders and their work." Another stressed how important it is "for the membership not to make negative or critical comments in general public on ministers/elders when they do not know how/why/what is going on."

Communicate with the Elders

Having meaningful conversation is a two-way street. It is important for elders to do what they can to engage in meaningful conversation, but it is also important for the members to keep the same thing in mind. As one member put it, the effectiveness of the

work of the elders is enhanced when the members themselves also "look for more opportunity to share something meaningful."

Quite a few members echoed the sentiment that they have a role to play in making the work of elders easier. "Let them know when you won't be attending church service/Lord's Supper. When there is sickness/problems but also happy occasions. Contact should not be one-sided." "Talk to them, let them know what is going on in your life. Don't always wait for the elder to initiate contact." "Keep them informed about family matters, etc." "Keep them informed about what's going on in the congregation." "Let him know when there's a need for assistance as he won't know if you don't tell him. If you have problems, talk to him so he's aware. Then he can help and if he can't maybe one of his fellow elders." "Include him in my list of people to contact for future plans." "Ask questions."

Various respondents affirmed their intention to be open and helpful and also to teach their children accordingly. "Be straightforward, honest, helpful to other members of the congregation and treat everyone the way I'd like to be treated. I think this would reduce the workload of the elders." Another mentioned wanting to give a "positive and helpful response when requests are made to me."

How Parents can Help

It is good to see that parents do not necessarily expect the elders to do everything when it comes to interacting with children. In response to question 22 of the Survey, one respondent made it clear that parents can also smooth the way for better interaction between the elders and their children simply by inviting the elders over more often.

Various parents also indicated that they see a task for themselves by preparing the children before an annual visit takes place. This can be done by explaining what the office of elders involves, who the elders are and why certain questions will be asked. In this way the children know what to expect. Parents can also encourage their children to participate to the best of their ability and not to feel as if this is an "exam." They can encourage children to ask questions too. Such encouragement can help the children to be more open and in this way improve communication.

Aside from this, a number of respondents expressed the awareness that it certainly helps if open communication about the faith takes place regularly among the family members. Then it also becomes easier for children to talk openly with elders. One parent also made a point of instructing the older children to keep the communication lines with their elder open by letting their elder know "when they're not in our worship service."

Another important way to set the stage for positive visits in the future is to discuss with the children how things went and speak in a positive way. If the parents have negative comments, they should do their best not to bring these forward when the children are around.

Challenges that Elders Face

Intensive Terms of Service

One member stressed that elders "should be left off any other committees or boards for the duration of their term." The work is indeed demanding enough as it is without adding to the burden. As it is, especially "younger elders with growing families cannot devote themselves properly to their task without sacrificing important time at home."

A woman who is married to someone who was or is an office bearer stressed the importance of giving elders "at least two years off between terms of service." This is indeed important for preventing burnout, since the years of service can be very draining. A good time of rest is essential. They as well as other elders also need time to ensure that the needs of their loved ones at home are met.

Preparation for Service

As explained in Appendix Four under this heading, elders generally serve three year terms. The table listing data about the elders' terms of service shows that 13 of a total of 26 responding office bearers are relatively new to their tasks. This means there will be uncertainties and mistakes common to beginners. The potential for this can be mitigated by teaming them up with experienced office bearers. Since possibilities are limited when it comes to establishing such teams, it is all the more essential to give thought to how to prepare such men effectively for their tasks.

The Canadian Reformed Churches do not have an official program for training men for being an elder or deacon. The Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons used in the Canadian Reformed Churches offers a brief but helpful outline of the institution of the offices of elder and deacon as well as the mandate given to them.[349] Elders benefit from reflection on this Form. Sometimes they watch and discuss a series of lectures by Dr. N. Kloosterman, available in video and DVD format.[350] Various books are available.[351] Ministers, elders, and deacons of the Canadian Reformed Churches can also

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[349] *Book of Praise*, 628-634.

[350] Nelson D. Kloosterman, *Visiting Members* (DVD series).

[351] Examples of some recent publications are John R. Sittema, *With a Shepherd's Heart: Reclaiming the Pastoral Office of Elder* (Grandville, Michigan: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 1996); Peter G. Feenstra, *The Glorious Work of Home Visits* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Premier Publishing, 2000); and a recent publication by Michael G. Brown, ed., *Called to Serve: Essays for Elders and Deacons,* (Grandville, Michigan: Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 2007).

read articles of a theological and practical nature in *Diakonia: For the Work of Service,* a

"Quarterly for Officebearers."[352]

Questions 2 to 7 in the Survey of Elders are devoted to matters pertaining to

"preparation for service." Responses tabulated in regard to Question 2 show that

conversations with fellow elders have been the most helpful for the large majority of such

office bearers (19 of 26 elders in the four congregations). Many have also benefited from

input from relatives or friends who have served as elder (11 of 26). Books have been

helpful for many as well (15 of 26). Half of the elders have found watching a video/DVD

presentation to be beneficial (13 of 26).[353] All have a subscription to *Diakonia,* but only

six of 26 elders categorize these as "most helpful." The articles in that periodical were

deemed less helpful than books, although a few elders offered positive comments: "Very

relevant topics and much to think about," and "Always helpful. To what degree often

dependent on specific issues being faced at a given time." Others acknowledged that

there are good articles, but some were found either to be "too lengthy," "too theological,"

or "too difficult."

Office bearers' conferences ranked the lowest (four of 26) in terms of usefulness.

However, there have been no conferences for office bearers (usually a half-day session)

during the last four years, which means that approximately half of the elders have not had

the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of such events for themselves. One elder

remarked that "office bearers' conferences come too late – after you are serving for a

period of time." Another noted that Bible Study and going over the Form for the

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Glorious Work of Home Visits (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Premier Publishing, 2000); and a recent publication
by Michael G. Brown, ed., *Called to Serve: Essays for Elders and Deacons,* (Grandville, Michigan:
Reformed Fellowship, Inc., 2007).

[352] *Diakonia: For the Work of Service: Quarterly for Officebearers,* (Langley, B.C.: Brookside Publishing).

[353] In most if not all the cases, this would be a video/DVD presentation by N.D. Kloosterman.

Ordination of Elders and Deacons is beneficial. There was also an elder who mentioned having benefited from interaction with congregation members, noting especially their encouragement.

Teamwork

The responses to question 4 showed that only 17 of 26 elders were teamed up with an experienced elder when they began their work. One elder noted: "We don't have teams but change elders on each home visit." This could mean that an inexperienced elder may still go on a visit with an experienced one, but this is not necessarily the case.

Responses to questions 5 and 6 of the Survey of elders gave an impression as to the teamwork that did take place. The large majority of elders (21 of 26) were positive in their evaluation of the benefit of visiting together with an experienced elder. Three were somewhat less positive, finding teamwork with an experienced elder to be "sometimes" beneficial. One noted that "not all experienced elders are good at conducting home visits." Another explained further that "sometimes the experienced elder has a set pattern and set questions. It is hard to learn from him. Other times it is good because of life experiences. Depends on the personality also."

The written positive responses showed appreciation for the wisdom, experience and knowledge of the experienced elders, highlighting that this contributed to the depth of the visits. As one elder summarized it, "Learned a lot by following example of how visits were conducted and learned by seeing that God, not man is central. Cannot carry all things on your own shoulders, but trust in our Heavenly Father." In general the results show that when an inexperienced elder learns to work together with an experienced elder this can be an effective way to further his development.

Teamwork does not necessarily presuppose that one elder has more experience than another. It does give the opportunity to work together in a fruitful way. Where this is not the case, as explained by one elder, this is when other elders are "not always so open to discuss things, lay out their concerns, offer advice, show interest in another's ward, and the issues that may exist."

Further Development

Time constraints seem to play a role in which options elders circled as being "do-able" in response to question 7, which sought to establish what could aid elders in their development. While they do appreciate instruction, they were somewhat more inclined to attend an annual half day seminar or presentation than to devoting a full day to such an event. A majority (14 of 26) prefers to have some instruction or discussion at each meeting of the office bearers. As one put it, "We grow as we go. Continual instruction and discussion is best." Another wrote that "self study is the best tool because you can pick the time and place." He also noted, "Instruction really needs to start in the home when growing up as a young person." Two elders did not choose any option. One explained that he feels that "prayer and the assurance that God will provide" is sufficient. There was also an elder who expressed the opinion that devoting more attention to the task of office bearers will help them "to feel more serious about their task, help them to discuss their task with each other."

Since the majority of elders benefit most from discussion of relevant topics among each other, devoting a certain amount of time to this at regular meetings could be a way of stimulating this process in a systematic way. This could be done in conjunction with the Scripture readings which take place at the beginning of meetings. It would then

be important to choose relevant passages accompanied by some explanation. Focusing on specific chapters in books or articles in *Diakonia* could perhaps also give focus to discussions. Talking about topics in conjunction with watching a video/DVD presentation or when attending a conference before elders embark on a new season of visiting could also prove to be beneficial. However, for some elders the time involved in this may prove to be a problem.

Objectives

Questions 8 to 14 focused on the actual work of home visits. If visits are to be effective, certain objectives need to be kept in mind. Question 8 (Do you prepare for visits by discussing beforehand with a fellow elder what your objectives will be?) focuses on this in particular.

Table 17. Preparation by elders for home visits

	R1	R2	C1	C2	N
Yes	4	3	1	2	10
Sometimes	3	4	3	4	14
No	0	0	1	1	2
Number of Respondents (elders)	7	7	5	7	26

The preceding table shows that although many elders do make a point of discussing beforehand what the objectives will be, this is not always the case. One reason for this could be that objectives are either assumed or not clarified in advance because both elders know the family well or not at all. Nevertheless, since elders often travel together when visiting, it would be good to review matters beforehand. It may also be useful to keep in mind how the previous home visit went. Which issues were addressed? Is follow-up needed for anything known about the individual or family currently? What could be brought forward to ensure that it will be an edifying visit? When objectives have been defined beforehand, evaluation after a visit also becomes easier.

Time Management

Next to the desire that many members have for informal contacts with their elders, there is also the other side of the matter. Elders and their families feel the pressure of time limitations. One respondent therefore stressed: "Do not overburden them with extra visits in the congregation. There is enough to do with the necessary and badly needed ones." Another wrote: "Being the spouse of an elder who has a full time job, I think congregation and ministers need to remember that most of our elders have jobs that keep them busy more than 40 hours a week. When they are expected to do extra visits (especially simply to elderly who have lots of family around) that takes time away from the elder's family. Time which is precious to begin with."

Solving the challenge of time constraints is not always simple. One individual recommended less involvement in committees. "Elders typically are given too many other responsibilities on top of 'watching' over the souls of men. Liaison work etc., takes more meeting time which should be spent in the wards." If an elder serves as a liaison member on a committee, his task should be restricted to that. He should not be involved in doing committee work. Elders should not take on work that can be delegated to others. Involvement in other committees should be discouraged.

An additional way to address many of the problems listed by congregation members is, as one suggested it, to "have more elders so their load is not so heavy." Otherwise it will be more difficult for them to do their work effectively.

Informal contacts with ward members do not all have to be "one on one" meetings. That would be time consuming. Small gestures can be very meaningful as well. Many emphasized that "even just saying hi at church, or a bit of small talk here and there

would be good." This makes a member "feel that he does not forget I am a member of his ward." According to one respondent, "an extra visit or a phone call a couple of times a year" helps increase the effectiveness of the work of elders. This is especially the case "when they know there are extra family difficulties."

A male in the 15 to 25 years old age group, who lives with his parents and finds the visits by the elders meaningful but not helpful, indicated that he thought the work of the elders could be more effective if he would be able to "come to their house rather than the other way around." This could be done relatively easily and saves travel time for elders. Further suggestions for promoting open communication included inviting individuals and families over "to encourage informal relationship, and casual conversation," "perhaps in group settings, e.g. getting families over for barbecue or Sunday lunch," "ward get-togethers," "ward picnics," as well as organizing "more church functions in order to build more personal relations."

Contacts with young people can be developed in group settings too. It is possible to have young people over on a Sunday evening for a cup of coffee or attend some of their sports functions or meetings. For example, elders could take turns attending Young Peoples' Society evenings. If eight elders take a turn every two weeks, they would only spend about two evenings with the young people during a typical study season. This would not only enhance the bonds between elders and the young people. It would also help provide guidance to these study societies that often struggle with discipline issues. After all, not every young person is equally motivated to participate in an orderly way.

Obstacles

To assess how elders can be helped in fulfilling their tasks, it is important to

know what kinds of obstacles they face. There may be personal obstacles in themselves

or obstacles that arise during their interaction with others. Question 9 ("If you visit as an

elder to admonish a person, have you encountered significant obstacles in yourself in

being able to do this as needed?") focuses on the elders personally.

Table 18. Significant personal obstacles in extending an admonition

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total
Yes	0	2	2	2	6
Sometimes	5	5	2	2	14
No	2	0	1	3	6
Total	7	7	5	7	26

One major difficulty verbalized by various elders was a feeling of being "no

better" and also "somewhat unsure what to say." "Nerves" play a role, as well as

"inexperience," leaving elders wondering how to respond to situations. For example, one

elder struggled with the question "how much compassion or how much discipline to use

in a given situation."

Becoming an elder can also have an impact on a person's social relationships.

One commented on no longer being able to "be as open with everyone." Examples of

other problems were "dealing with members who make promises, but don't follow

through," or who are "obstinate, not honest." Controversial issues also sap energy.

Dealing with "mixed courtship and mixed marriages" (i.e. marriage to unbelievers) was

mentioned too. It is also not easy when "the person you are visiting is never at fault. It is

consistory or other church members." "Working long over a situation with no results"

also drains energy.

In general, how do elders experience their work? Are they able to do it with joy?

Finding this out was the purpose of question 17 of the Survey of Elders.

Table 19. Is the elder able to do his work with joy?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total
Yes	5	4	3	6	18
Sometimes	2	3	2	1	8
Total	7	7	5	7	26

None of the elders indicated that they experienced no joy in their work. A large

majority (18 out of 26) answered in the affirmative. The others answered "sometimes,"

one of the reasons being that the work was also felt to be a burden next to their regular

occupation. The difficulties involved in doing the work of elder were found to be

"overwhelming and stressful" at times. With this come feelings of inadequacy and a lack

of confidence. One elder wrote: "There is often a worry: is one is doing the right thing or

is one doing enough." Speaking openly with each other as elders about such matters

would make it easier to give and receive support when needed.

In response to question 19 ("What do you find to be the most difficult aspects of

your work as elder?"), elders described some of the difficulties. "Dealing with the human

loss of life (sadness)" is a significant challenge. One of the elders commented that when

facing crisis situations it is hard "to know when to visit, how often to visit, what to say,

etc. This is very different from an annual home visit where both parties know what to

expect." An elder mentioned that it is not always easy to find "the right Bible passage to

read," while another wondered whether or not to pray and read at an informal visit.

In general, the workload was also felt to be a burden. Since ministers have

various tasks within and outside the congregation, they cannot be expected to be the ones

to do all the visiting. Elders need to devote time to the members in their wards. However,

they find it a challenge "to find enough time to do the job well," maintaining contacts with the members. "Making a visit to an experienced elder" was also felt to be difficult.

A member cautioned against having younger men as elder "too early so that by the mid-40s they are 'burned out.'" Another remark worth reflecting on is: "Use elders where their talents are, not expecting that all elders can do everything because they are an elder."

Elders are expected to be "able to teach" (1 Ti 3:2). However, as a few described it, they do not always find it easy to work with "those who are challenging the Reformed faith" and to explain various doctrines "especially if you have questions yourself" or have "not thought about it much." Trying to bring about a change of attitudes that are "contrary to Scriptural instruction" is also a daunting task.

In dealing with difficulties and uncertainties, prayer was felt to be of significant help. One elder wrote down a thought also shared by others: "Many times I feel like Jonah but through prayer you find the strength to do the task set before you. After the visit your heart is lightened because God has guided you."

What was also found to be helpful was to discuss matters before the visit with a fellow elder. If a visit proves to be very difficult and elders are at loss as to what to do next, there is also the possibility of asking other elders at a consistory meeting how to proceed. Oversight and discipline are shared responsibilities in Reformed churches.

Church discipline

Church discipline is exercised in the Canadian Reformed Churches when members fail to respond positively to repeated admonitions from the elders. The procedure is outlined in Article 68 of the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed

Churches and is also reflected in the Form for the Excommunication of Non-Communicant Members and the Form for the Excommunication of Communicant Members.[354]

Members are not always aware of how elders are dealing with wayward members, since this is confidential. Rightly or wrongly so, at times the impression may arise that not enough is being done or even that nothing is being done. As a result, it was not surprising to read the comment from a member who complained that the elders "compromise and sweep things under the carpet. They can't make decisions and issues drag out." Along similar lines, another member expressed the importance of making it known sooner if someone is straying so that attention can be given to this in prayers. This is worth keeping in mind, since the procedure for excommunication does involve first informing the congregation and requesting prayer for a straying member and not until later mentioning the person's name or proceeding to the excommunication of that individual.

After congregational prayer for members who persist in certain sins without repenting, patience can be required. However, this should not lead to situations where the congregation is left wondering for too long a time if progress has been made or not. Aside from the fact that church discipline is meant to honour God and bring back an unrepentant sinner, the aspect of preserving the holiness of the congregation is an important factor for elders to consider. If a sinful situation persists it can have destructive effects. Timely discipline, on the other hand, can be edifying for all.

Elders find it challenging to know how to deal with straying members, "because people sometimes perceive you as being self-righteous." One of the greatest difficulties is

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[354] *Book of Praise,* 673-674, 607-614.

when admonitions fail and steps of further church discipline need to be contemplated. Where is "the cut off point"? It is difficult to "reach or help those who refuse to see you," or "who don't have the mental capacity to discuss things rationally." Such remarks highlight the need for consultation and mutual encouragement among the elders.

The Rewards of Eldership

In response to question 18, elders described what they found were rewarding aspects of their work. In general, home visits are definitely highlights for the elders. They are usually welcomed warmly by the congregation members and often very open and honest conversation takes place.

Elders derive joy from knowing that they are instruments in the hands of the Lord "to do his work," contributing to the well-being of the people of God. It is satisfying by the grace of God to be able to help others with their problems, give comfort and admonition where needed and see positive results. One rejoiced, for example, in being "able to talk with members about the rich blessings of salvation through grace." Another mentioned enjoying visiting the sick.

Various elders mentioned that it is a source of joy to hear people expressing their trust in the Lord and to see them serving him. It is rewarding to be part of their lives, sharing "their joy and sadness." Witnessing evidence of "the Spirit at work" and consequent "spiritual growth of members" is also refreshing. Repeated mention was made of how rewarding it is to work with young people. One elder mentioned having given a premarital course to a couple, while others touched on working with young people who are preparing for public profession of their faith.

Elders benefit personally from the work they do as office bearers. One elder pointed out that he finds visiting rewarding because it "strengthens my life of faith and dependence on God." There are blessings that come from being "busy with the Word." Elders pointed out that in the process, their insight in Scripture and its applications increase. They experience the grace of the Lord at work in their own lives as they help others.

Elders also derived satisfaction from "interacting with upstanding office bearers in own church or in classes (visiting ministers)" and from "participating in significant decisions such as establishment of ecclesiastical fellowship with URC, OPC, ERQ, etc." the abbreviations referring to various church federations with which the Canadian Reformed Churches have relations.

Looking at the larger picture, an elder mentioned the joy of "seeing the hand of the Lord in the gathering and preservation of his church. I love the Lord and his people." People may not always be appreciative of the work of elders. However, there is also comfort in "knowing that God will reward those who are diligent in their office."

Answers to question 20 brought to light that being an elder also has a significant impact on a person's family. In general this was felt to be a positive experience. "What has been learned in discussion with other elders and during visits" can be personally enriching, but also helps to be a better leader in the family. One wrote: "I feel that through my visits the Lord has also given me direction in what I should or should not be doing in my family." There is also "growth in faith, growth in Scripture knowledge." An elder learns "to depend more on the Lord" and "how to deal with people."

Someone who is an elder has less time available for his wife and children. This is not easy, but elders also commented that "it is good for a family to see that the work for God's Kingdom is needed" and "it gave them an example of service for others." The spiritual growth experienced by elders is something that "is passed along to your wife and children."

Topics for a Manual or a Presentation for Elders

Elders stressed the need for training. As one explained, this begins in the homes and families, where one learns to live "a life of thankfulness as a child of the Lord." "A clear understanding of Scripture" needs to be developed "in our homes and from the pulpit." How to live "in the joy of faith" was mentioned too.

Once a person becomes an elder, the training needs to become more specific. Reference was made to the value of books. Pointers were requested in regard to how to improve family devotions, individual reading and prayer, as well as how to find one's way around the Bible, knowing what passages to read for various topics.

In relation to various issues they face, elders also suggested focusing on topics such as the following: the importance of the communion of the saints; ways to build fellowship in the church; how to get the trust of weak members; how to prepare young people for being confessing members of the church; effective ways to reach your ward members; how to make a home visit more meaningful and productive; how to lead an effective home visit with young children present; baby (baptism) visits; how to help people deal with broken relationships (especially marriages); how to deal with mental illness and depression; how to help people deal with addictions and other recurring sins; how to approach members in the last days of their life; how to deal with human tragedies

(loss of life) and funerals; the importance of financial contributions (firstfruits); and how to deal with the challenges of modern culture (e.g. materialism, leisure time, various forms of entertainment). Elders also expressed the desire to know more about how to deal with doctrinal issues as well as false religions.

Since elders are called to exercise church discipline, it is not surprising to encounter questions in this area: how to deal with disobedient baptized members; how to reach out to help people who refuse to see you; how to deal with rebellion, discipline, lack of respect, and promiscuity; how to be patient with members who agree with you, but then go their own way anyway; how to strive toward a positive outcome for church discipline instead of antagonizing people; and how to show God's mercy to repentant sinners, helping them live life full of joy again, free of guilt.

Elders are responsible for ensuring that in the church everything is "done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Co 14:40). Some would therefore like to see discussion on topics pertaining to the worship services (e.g. contemporary music, yes or no; how we celebrate the Lord's Supper). The "nature" of the church order was also mentioned as a possible discussion topic.

How to cope with the emotional strain of being an elder was also an issue some would like to see addressed. When facing stressful situations it can be difficult for an elder to know how to deal with his own emotions. "Leaving the results to the LORD" requires patience. It can be "hard to remain positive" in difficult circumstances. You "learn and hear things about people that you didn't know about before. It takes a lot of time and effort. Things can be on your mind which can affect productivity and concentration at work. You can become preoccupied at home with things on your mind."

Matters of oversight and discipline are dealt with by the elders together at consistory meetings. It is a challenge to ensure that such meetings are conducted in an efficient way that also does justice to whatever is discussed. What can be done in advance to prevent lengthy discussions? What should be dealt with at meetings? How should visits be reported on? What information should be shared? Such questions are also worth addressing since they have a direct impact on the wellbeing of the church.

A Focused Approach

It is important to have a holistic approach in which ministers, elders, and deacons work together for the well-being of the church. For this reason, regular meetings with a clear focus are essential. The office bearers need to establish short term and long term goals to address the calling and the needs of the congregations they are serving. Input based on informal contacts as well as the annual home visits is crucial in this process.

Ministers of the Word are in a unique position to remind the congregation members of their individual and collective calling to live to the glory of God, seeking his kingdom as followers of Jesus Christ. They also address many needs of the congregation while preaching on Sundays and in further teaching and visiting activities. In particular, the regular, focused proclamation of the Word of God plays a key role in the life of the church. Ministers should not be left to carry this burden alone. They can benefit greatly from what the elders say concerning the needs of the congregation.[355] Through their annual home visits as well as through the informal contacts that they maintain with the

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[355] The Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons stresses the cooperation between elders and the minister: "Together they tend the flock of God which is in their charge." The Form also highlights the responsibility of the elders "to assist the ministers of the Word with good counsel and advice" as well as exercising "supervision of the doctrine and conduct of these fellow servants." See: *Book of Praise*, 630.

members, elders can offer suggestions as to issues that should be addressed and questions that require answers.

Elders often give input to ministers during a periodic sermon review which is held a few times a year or more regularly. It is good to reflect on how to do this in a constructive way. Such cooperation is potentially beneficial for all the office bearers in the process of building up the local body of Christ which they are serving. The preaching will then have a greater impact on the life of a church. This in turn will affect the work of the elders as well as the deacons who continue to assess the needs of sheep of the flock and address them in a personal way during their visits.

Good teamwork among the office bearers has already shown its usefulness. The ongoing challenge is to maintain and develop such teamwork further with a view to equipping church members for works of service as Christians in the church and the world under Christ their King.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter One of this dissertation explains what prompted this study. Despite the fact that Scripture speaks of the appointment of elders in the early Christian Church, many churches in North America are not familiar with the value of elders in church leadership. The situation in the Canadian Reformed Churches is different, since a body of elders serves in each congregation. Nevertheless, some people have questions about this office while others express dissatisfaction with the work of elders.

The elders who are the focus of this investigation are distinguished from ministers of the Word. This dissertation was written to determine within the context of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Manitoba how elders individually and as a body can be helped to understand more deeply their role and importance in preparing "God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph 4:12). The following three questions served to guide the exploration of this topic. What does the Bible say about offices, in particular the office of elder? Which insights of Martin Bucer and John Calvin, two Reformers of the 16th Century, are either already reflected in or could enrich the Canadian Reformed understanding of office, in particular the office of elder? What information can be derived from input given by elders and congregation members to help establish what elders in the Canadian Reformed Churches need to know and be able to do in order to function effectively in their work of shepherding the flock?

Chapter Two focuses on the Scriptural foundations for the concept of office, in particular that of elders. Although the term "office" does not occur in the Old Testament, the concept is there. The theme of service is a prominent aspect of office, as can be seen when focusing on the Hebrew term ^{c}*bd* "to toil, work, work for, serve" in the Old Testament. It is exemplified in the development of the "servant of the LORD" (^{c}*bd YHWH*) concept.

Elders already occupied a position of authority and leadership in Old Testament times. Moses, a "servant of the LORD," involved them in sharing responsibility for leadership. They helped guard stability and order, instructing the people of God and applying God's law. This is a task that has continuing relevance with a view to ensuring the continuation of good order in the life of God's people.

The work of prophets also contains elements that can be related to the functioning of elders now. They spoke on behalf of the LORD, addressing all aspects of life with words of salvation or judgment.

There is also room for reflection on connections between the task of priests and Levites and ecclesiastical offices today. Priests and Levites in Old Testament times functioned as mediators between God and his people, occupying a central role in the ministry of reconciliation. Their task, however, also included giving guidance and instruction.

The Old Testament office of priests has been fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus Christ, who sacrificed himself for the salvation of his people. This is highlighted in the New Testament along with a subsequent emphasis on the priestly office of all believers.

Nevertheless, connections can still be drawn between the work of priests and Levites and that of elders today, in particular those now called ministers of the Word.

Kingship in Israel was to be an expression of God's rule over his people. Even though kings often failed in this, the institution as such foreshadowed the future rule of the Messiah, a unique Davidic king. Any form of authority and its exercise in the church today by elders will have to take into account the unique kingship of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

It is important to keep Jesus Christ in mind when seeking to understand what ecclesiastical offices entail. The offices of prophet, priest and king in the Old Testament foreshadow Christ's threefold office; they also find their fulfillment in him.

Through the Holy Spirit, the ascended Christ has given gifts to the church. These include ecclesiastical offices. There is no reason to construe a tension between "charismatic gifts" and ecclesiastical offices, since there is a Christological and pneumatological connection between the two.

Although there is no specific term in the New Testament for the concept of ecclesiastical office, certain people are given specific tasks which can be regarded as forms by means of which service (*diakonia*) is rendered in an official way to the body of Christ, the church. Such service was initially rendered by the apostles, whose work is fundamental for the New Testament church.

Next to the apostles there were prophets who received special revelations from God. Although they could at times speak about future events, their primary task seems to have been to edify the church. The latter function continues through the ministry of the Word today. Evangelists proclaimed the gospel too, but were not tied down to one place.

Paul's reference to "pastors and teachers" can be understood as describing the work of elders as a group, but it is also possible to distinguish between them according to particular abilities and tasks. Elders played a leading role in the life of the New Testament church. Among them, the elders in Jerusalem may have formed a special group.

Early in the development of church life in the book of Acts, reference is made to elders being chosen. The term "elders" indicates their position as leaders. The term "overseer" describes the nature of their task, which involves pastoral activity. The data from the New Testament gives reason to conclude that eldership was intended to be a permanent office in the church and that it is possible to distinguish elders who are primarily ministers of the Word from those whose work involves shepherding and governing the church.

Canadian Reformed Churches do not have female elders. The rationale for this is rooted in the creation order, where the headship of man already comes into the foreground. This principle of headship is maintained in the New Testament. Women are active in various ways, but they do not hold official positions of authority in the church.

Acts 6:1-7 highlights the importance of ensuring that the ministry of mercy takes place in an orderly way in the church. The serving nature of the task described there correlates well with what can be concluded from the office of deacons who worked together with the elders. Within the parameters of Scriptural data, there is room for further reflection on how women can become more involved in the ministry of mercy.

Drawing together the various components for orderly service in the leadership of the church, I come to the following definition of ecclesiastical office. All of this can be

applied to the office of elders. Ecclesiastical office is a position of leadership in the church involving the fulfillment of a divine mandate. It must be fulfilled with the authority of the Word in the name of Jesus Christ, under his authority. It must be regulated by the church (i.e. through a Church Order). It must be continuous, having a permanent character. It must be done in cooperation with fellow office bearers. It must be characterized by a serving attitude. It must be fulfilled in a capable way. It must be geared to building the church up, equipping the members for service, using the God-given means of grace.

Keeping in mind the benefit of learning from the theological reflections of others, in Chapter Two special attention was also devoted to relevant insights from Martin Bucer and John Calvin, Reformers of the 16th Century. The following conclusions were drawn.

Highlighting the kingship of Jesus Christ and office bearers as his servants enabled Bucer to steer between the dangers of elevating ecclesiastical office unduly and undermining their authority. The kingship of Christ served as a focal point for defining the purpose of the church in its inner functioning as well as in its mission in society.

Bucer's pneumatological emphasis is evident where he stresses that through the Spirit, Christ unites believers as one body under himself as the Head. This body is recognizable by adherence to the Word in the preaching, the sacraments and discipline, under the leadership of men to whom Christ has given special gifts through the Spirit for ministering to the needs of the body of Christ.

Bucer viewed the structure of the various ecclesiastical offices as being basically presbyteral. Although one may become a leader among the elders, responsibilities for leadership are to be shared and cooperation is essential.

As servants of Jesus Christ, office bearers are to give attention to the spiritual as well as physical needs of the members, promoting their well-being and thereby enhancing the effective use of their gifts for advancing the cause of the kingdom of Christ.

In addition to the general calling to service, Bucer also spoke of a special calling, validated not only by desire and ability, but also by the opportunity given by the church to exercise the gifts that have been recognized. In this way gifts of the Spirit can be put to proper use in an orderly way within the Spirit-filled body of Christ.

Bucer stressed the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven as expressed in the proclamation of the Word and linked to the government and discipline of the church. Next to the administration of the Word and the sacraments as marks of the church, he stressed the importance of individualized pastoral care through home visits, involving church discipline where necessary.

According to Bucer, church discipline is the third mark of the church. It is responsibility of the body of the church as a whole, but elders play a special role in exercising it. He also stressed that church discipline should be exercised with patience. Although Bucer's ideals in regard to church discipline were not successfully implemented in Strasbourg, they did have a direct impact on Reformed churches elsewhere from the 16th century onwards as well as indirectly through Calvin. Bucer's insights have had an impact on Reformed churches and continue to be of value to this day.

Like Bucer, Calvin's thought is characterized by a pneumatological emphasis. He saw a connection between the lordship of Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in

the church. Believers have communion with Christ through the Holy Spirit. This perspective shaped his view of the church and of ecclesiastical office.

Calvin derived insights from the early church fathers as well as from interaction with contemporaries. He stressed the importance of the church as the mother of believers, with office bearers functioning as instruments by means of which God does his work. He viewed apostles, prophets, and evangelists as having temporary offices, distinguishing them from what he described as permanent offices. There is a development and also flexibility in his terminology, but essentially the offices consist of two sorts of elders, namely ministers of the Word and "censors of morals," otherwise referred to as "overseers," and next to them deacons.

While emphasizing proper order in the church in regard to the election of office bearers, Calvin exhibited a balanced approach to the matter of internal and external calling as well as to the role both of office bearers and of the congregation in regard to those who are eligible to be called to office. He viewed church government in terms of a Christocracy. Christ is the sole head of the church and office bearers function under his authority. While maintaining the authority of the Word of God in the church, he also showed flexibility in regard to the development of orderly rules and procedures for the life of the church.

Calvin regarded preaching and church discipline as keys of the kingdom. Discipline should go hand in hand with moderation and gentleness in maintaining the holiness of the church, since sanctification is an ongoing process. He stressed that for pastoral care to take place effectively, office bearers should visit the members annually in their homes.

Calvin's influence went far beyond Geneva, having an impact on Reformed churches throughout the world. That influence is characterized by an emphasis on the authority of the Word of God and on Jesus Christ as the head of the church, who uses office bearers as his instruments in furthering the cause of the gospel. Calvin's explanation of the biblical steps for church discipline is reflected in the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the relevant Forms for Excommunication and for Readmission. His views have also undergone some refinement. The Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons used by the Canadian Reformed Churches shows a more positive emphasis in regard to the task of elders. The aspects of giving comfort and instruction are in the foreground, while discipline is mentioned secondarily. Reformed churches have also progressed beyond Calvin in according a greater role to the congregation in the election of office bearers.

Both Bucer and Calvin made it clear that elders can play an important role in the spiritual development of the church by means of home visits. Such visits form a key component in the work of elders in the Canadian Reformed Churches. In this regard, it is essential to attempt to define the purpose of their activities. After surveying various manuals, I come to the following definition: To equip the saints as citizens of the kingdom of God individually and corporately for works of service, seeking to build them up to live to the praise of their covenant God in the church and the world according to their calling as Christians who have been united through the Holy Spirit with Jesus Christ, their Saviour and King.

The burden of the work of elders takes place through visiting members in their homes. Proceeding from the Reformed understanding of the office of elder, the next

question is how it is actually functioning. This is the focal point of the next part of the dissertation.

In Chapter Three, an explanation is given for the methodology underlying the surveys used for gathering information as to how elders in the Canadian Reformed Churches are functioning in practice. Questions characteristic of quantitative and qualitative research were used to gather information from two rural and two city congregations in Manitoba. There were two surveys: one for individual communicant members and one for elders. The purpose of these surveys was to gain some insight in the spiritual well-being of the members and to establish how elders can contribute to their development.

An explanation is provided concerning the procedure followed in distributing and assessing the surveys. The input received also provides insight in how the wording of various questions could be improved. Some responses also necessitated a different approach to the assessment than was originally envisioned. An overview of the issues involved is provided in case someone would like to conduct a similar survey and make adjustments in some of the questions.

Of approximately 720 surveys given to individual communicant members of the above-mentioned churches, 269 were received in return. The "Survey of Elders" was passed on to all of the 29 elders; 26 responded. The statistical information derived from the data obtained from the surveys is reported in the form of tables. In most cases, the data is represented in terms of percentages in order to make comparison between the congregations possible. Some of the tables present the information in terms of numbers of

respondents rather than as percentages. This approach was generally taken where numbers were very low and where using percentages would be less clear.

Chapter Four gives an overview of the information provided by the surveys. Both the statistical information and the many comments made by those who responded to the questions portray the strengths and weaknesses that can be discerned in the work of elders. The results form the basis for drawing conclusions as to what areas in the life of the congregation as a whole and of the members individually need special attention. They also serve to provide suggestions as to how to improve the functioning of the office of elder.

The results of the Survey of Individual Communicant Members can be summarized in the following points. The respondents were unanimous in affirming their trust in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. All but five also affirmed that they try to serve God each day according to his Word because they are thankful for salvation. Those who were exceptions indicated that this is "sometimes" true for them.

Most respondents read their Bible and pray regularly. Younger members do this more often than older ones. Those who do not read their Bible or listen to a Bible reading very often are less likely to talk about the Christian faith with others. People in rural congregations are more likely to talk about the faith than those in city congregations. The majority of the respondents prepare themselves in one way or another for worship services.

There are some significant variations in the degree of connectedness experienced by respondents in the churches. Factors that all show a positive correlation with feeling connected as church member are the frequency of Bible reading, prayer, preparation for

Sunday worship services, the frequency of church attendance, participation in church-related activities, and talking to fellow church members about the Christian faith. These are therefore things that elders should pay attention to when dealing with members who feel disconnected.

Whether or not someone is an immigrant does not in itself present a significant reason for feeling connected or disconnected. How old immigrants were when they immigrated is not a significant factor. Gender is also not a significant factor in a person's sense of feeling connected as a church member. However, it should be noted that members in the 26 to 35 year old age bracket are in a decade of life when their sense of connectedness to the church can decrease significantly.

A large number of respondents feels "quite connected" to "very well connected" as church members if they have informal contact (a visit, a telephone call or a chat when they happen to meet their elder) at least three times a year. Many members still feel "connected" if there is informal contact between them and the elders once or twice a year.

Members who prepare themselves for the annual home visit are more likely to find it helpful than those who do not. A majority of elders and congregation members find it helpful to work with a prearranged topic for the annual home visit. However, flexibility is desirable to ensure that the needs of those being visited are addressed adequately.

Elders frequently discuss the preaching of the Word with members. Self-examination, on the other hand, is often only sometimes a topic of conversation. When elders discuss the matter of voluntary financial contributions with members, they tend to be more faithful in giving.

Elders ask a variety of questions during home visits. In most cases, the types of questions asked in one congregation are comparable with those asked elsewhere. Respondents enjoy discussion, but indicated discomfort when questions felt more like an interrogation. In general, people living in the home of someone who was or is an office bearer tend to be more open about talking with elders about their walk with God.

Elders have a harder time connecting with children than with their parents. This is an area that needs attention. Respondents from rural areas are less likely than those from the city to share their physical, spiritual, mental, or emotional problems with elders. Respondents are more likely to open up if confidentiality is maintained and the elder comes across in a compassionate way.

Most members are prepared to take the instruction, advice, or admonitions of an elder seriously if it is biblically sound, sensible, and brought in a humble way.

In three of the four congregations, less than half of the members found the annual home visits by the elders generally "helpful." However, when that number is combined with the number of those who found such visits "sometimes" helpful, the scores are more encouraging, averaging better than 90%. An important factor leading to a positive evaluation is when elders come prepared and have an open, encouraging discussion, but are also flexible, listening to concerns and addressing them. Having prior informal contact was also beneficial.

Best experiences with elders arise when they show genuine interest and a loving attitude, especially during times of crisis. Worst experiences are caused by elders who are unprepared and impersonal. Members also regret not receiving attention during a crisis or when it is not given until much later. There were also complaints about deficient

communication skills, a lack of sensitivity, a judgmental and arrogant attitude, a lack of follow-up, as well as a breach of confidentiality.

Looking ahead, members expressed the resolve to support the work of elders in prayer and in other ways. They also stressed that elders need preparation to work with the Word effectively and that they should set a good example.

Respondents also offered suggestions for improving communication. They recognized that communication is a two-way street. A higher frequency of informal contact contributes significantly to more open and helpful discussion. This is especially the case when dealing with female members.

Showing genuine interest includes focusing on the members. This should go together with a compassionate, helping attitude. Open-ended, relevant questions are often good ways to encourage discussion.

Parents offered good pointers as to how to build bridges to the children. In particular, taking time to get to know the children in informal settings is essential. Asking clear questions or making comments appropriate to their age level and in a way that encourages dialogue is also very important.

Elders should know when to speak and when to listen. That helps prepare the way for making comments that are relevant and helpful. Experience in general and experience in dealing with particular members are assets if an elder is also humble in his interaction. Lack of experience can be partially compensated by listening well and being willing to be educated about issues that they are not familiar with.

Members hope for personal discussions in which they can be open about what concerns them. Examples included struggles with certain sins, emotional instability, and

problems in marriage and the family. They also appreciate being able to discuss concerns about the communion of saints and at times need guidance in their interaction with others.

When arranging a visit, elders do well to ask members if there are special concerns they would like to talk about. They can also solicit feedback during their visits in order to minister to the needs of the members with increasing effectiveness.

Members understand the importance of giving spiritual support to elders as well as helping them in other ways where possible. This involves keeping the communication lines open and fostering a supportive environment at home and at church. Various comments also made it clear that times of rest between terms of service are important for preventing elders from suffering from burnout. These observations need to be kept in mind in view of the arguments some theologians have brought forward in favour of lifetime eldership.

Elders use various resources to prepare them for their work. Conversations with each other rank as the most helpful, followed by reading books, watching a video/DVD presentation, reading *Diakonia* (a quarterly publication), and attending conferences for office bearers.

Various suggestions can be made on the basis of the input gathered from the surveys. Teaming up with experienced elders is beneficial for new elders. Further development can be promoted in a variety of ways. However, it seems that regular discussions at meetings of the office bearers would be the best option to pursue. When going on a visit it is helpful to define objectives beforehand.

To maximize the amount of time available for eldership, it is essential for elders to avoid taking on tasks that can be done by others. Effective use of time also involves remembering that informal contacts do not have to be lengthy. Activities in group settings can also provide opportunities for such contacts.

Prayer and consultation with fellow elders was felt to be helpful in dealing with difficulties and uncertainties in the work of elders. Comments from congregation members and from elders make it clear that church discipline should be exercised in a timely way.

Although eldership involves a considerable amount of time and effort, elders find their work to be rewarding. Next to the burdens of the office, it has a positive impact on the life of the elder and his family.

The list of possible topics for a presentation for elders or a manual gives an impression of the variety of challenges that elders face in fulfilling their tasks. Not all elders have the time, energy or ability to sit down and work their way through a book on their own. Many benefit from interaction with each other. For this reason if topics are presented in a manual, it would be useful to present them in short sections that lend themselves well for a brief round of discussion. Consistory meetings generally begin with Scripture reading and prayer. It would be a simple matter to open with prayer and then read a Scripture passage relevant to the work of the elders in combination with a brief meditation and a few discussion questions. In this way it would be possible to make effective use of the time at the beginning of a meeting and work through a list of topics that can help them do their work more effectively.

Although ministers of the Word play a key role in the life of Reformed churches, spiritual leadership is shared with the elders. During their informal contacts with members and their visits with the sheep of the flock, elders gain insight in the needs of the congregation and issues and questions that need to be addressed. They are in a unique position to assist the minister with observations and advice that can have a significant positive impact on the weekly proclamation of the Word. They do well to consider how they can do this constructively in a way that benefits the entire congregation. This biblical system of church leadership is already in place and functioning. The challenge remains to ensure that it will continue to show its value for the life of Reformed churches.

Conclusion

Churches should let the light of Scripture shine on their practices, no matter how ancient the pedigree of their practices may be. The Word of God is the instrument used by the Holy Spirit to enable the church to function effectively in obedience to Christ, the Head of the church. Whoever wishes to reflect faithfully on the church and her functioning should therefore humbly submit to the authority of Scripture.

Truly Reformed churches are characterized by the ongoing desire to learn from Scripture, but also from church history as to how to bring all of life, including church life, in fruitful submission to the will of God in serving him. They oppose traditionalism, which is guaranteed to rob the church of contemporary relevance, estranging her from her calling to give an ongoing living response of faith to the challenges of the present. It is a mistake simply to elevate church life of the past to the level of an absolute standard or rigid pattern for the present and future. However, unwillingness to learn from past history will undoubtedly lead to a repetition of past mistakes. Listening to those who have

interpreted Scripture in preceding centuries helps guard against simplistic conclusions as well as aberrations caused by misinterpretations or selective reading of the Word of God.

This dissertation has offered insights on eldership gained from studying Scripture and relevant portions from the work of Martin Bucer and John Calvin. However, the picture could not be completed without input from the elders themselves and the church of Jesus Christ that they serve. At the end of the Survey of Individual Communicant Members, several lines were left blank and respondents were invited to offer further general comments to assist the elders in their work. One member verbalized a thought shared by many: "I want all elders to know that their good work is very needed and much appreciated." A final suggestion was: "If the results of this survey show general overall problems, get people together to seek solutions."

"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another" (Prov 27:17). The structures for approaching problems in the Canadian Reformed Churches are already in place. Plural leadership is alive and well. May the elders continue to function well as instruments in the hands of Jesus Christ as they seek to build up the body of Christ together with the ministers and deacons!

APPENDIX 1: A Survey of Individual Communicant Members

Dear brother or sister,

Along with this letter you will find "A Survey of Communicant Members." Participation in this survey is both *voluntary* and *anonymous*. The answers that you provide will form part of a dissertation project which I am writing as part of the requirements for my Doctor of Ministry Studies at Providence Theological Seminary in Otterburne, Manitoba. This project focuses on the office of elder. The survey will help provide information relevant to the work of the elder in connection with home visits and informal contacts with congregation members.

The survey is for communicant members from the Canadian Reformed Churches of Winnipeg (Grace and Redeemer) and from Carman (East and West). The purpose will be first of all to gain general impressions as to how church members are doing spiritually. This can help to establish what areas in the life of the congregation may need special attention so that elders can better contribute to your spiritual well-being. The responses to questions about the functioning of the elders will serve as a resource to help them function in their office more effectively.

In the survey attached to this letter, you will find some questions that will make it possible for me to group results together statistically in various ways to see, for example, if patterns emerge according to age, gender, or location. For this reason, please fill in the survey by yourself rather than together with someone else.

In order for the results to be collected and dealt with in an orderly way, the survey should be *filled in by June 1, 2008.* Please put the results in the envelope you received together with the survey, seal it, and give to the clerk of your consistory or bring it to the consistory room. The responses will be passed on to me together to help preserve anonymity. For this reason, please do not put your name either on the survey or on the envelope. The results are meant to be collected and presented in such a way as to preserve the anonymity of the individual sources. After the project has been completed and officially accepted by the faculty of Providence Theological Seminary, the survey you have filled in will be destroyed.

May the Lord bless the results of this study and use it for the upbuilding of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Your cooperation will be much appreciated.

With pastoral greetings,

Rev. A.J. Pol

A Survey of Individual Communicant Members

Please circle the number of the answer which you feel is applicable or else fill in the blank lines.
If you need more space for comments, please feel free to use another sheet of paper.

1. "I trust in Jesus Christ *alone* for my salvation."
   1. Yes, this applies to me.
   2. No. I can contribute to my salvation at least partly.
   3. No. I can save myself by good works.
   4. I don't really care about my salvation.

2. "I try to serve God each day according to his Word because I am thankful for salvation."
   1. Yes, this is how I try to live.
   2. This is sometimes how I try to live.
   3. Not really.

3. How often do you read the Bible or listen to a Bible reading?
   1. More than three times a day.
   2. Two or three times a day.
   3. Once a day.
   4. Now and then and on Sundays.
   5. Only on Sundays.

4. If you live with someone else / others, do you also read the Bible by yourself?
   1. Two or more times a day.
   2. Once a day.
   3. Now and then.
   4. I usually don't read the Bible by myself.
   5. Not applicable because I live alone.

5. How often do you pray or listen to a prayer?
   1. Often, besides at mealtimes.
   2. Once or twice a day besides at mealtimes.
   3. At mealtimes.
   4. Now and then.
   5. I don't pray.

6. How do you prepare yourself for Sunday worship services? (Circle any or all answers that apply).
   1. I pray about the worship services at home or before the worship services begin.
   2. I read the text in church before the service starts.
   3. I try to get enough sleep.
   4. I don't usually prepare in any special way at all.
   5. Other: _____

7. How often do you usually go to church?
   1. Twice each Sunday.
   2. Once each Sunday.
   3. A few times a month.
   4. I would like to go, but can't (e.g. because of age, illness, etc.)

   Feel free to explain: _____

   _____

8. Rate how connected you feel as a member of the church:
   1. Very well connected.
   2. Quite well connected.
   3. Connected.
   4. Somewhat disconnected.
   5. Very disconnected.

   Feel free to explain: _____

   _____

9. Are you part of a Bible study group, committee or volunteer group (includes choir) in the church, or involved with the local Christian school?
   1. Yes.
   2. Sometimes.
   3. No.

   Feel free to explain: _____

   _____

10. Do you talk with fellow church members about the Christian faith when suitable opportunities arise?
    1. Yes.
    2. Sometimes.
    3. Never.

11. Do you talk with people outside our church community about the Christian faith when suitable opportunities arise?
    1. Yes.
    2. Sometimes.
    3. Never.

12. Do you think hospitality is an important part of the Christian life?
    1. Yes.
    2. I'm not sure.
    3. No.

13. Aside from collections for the needy, do you / does your spouse give regular voluntary financial contributions to the local church?
    1. Yes.
    2. I / we would like to contribute, but I'm / we are not earning enough.
    3. I/we contribute, but it should be more.
    4. No, I/we don't give anything.

14. Do you prepare for the annual home visit by prayer or giving thought to what you might want to discuss with the elders?
    1. Yes.
    2. Sometimes.
    3. No.

15. Some consistories use one of the Ten Commandments, the petitions of the Lord's Prayer or another topic as a theme chosen for the annual home visit. Do you think that it is / would be helpful to have a prearranged discussion topic as a way to get a conversation going about your spiritual life?
    1. Yes.
    2. Undecided.
    3. No.

    Feel free to explain: _____

    _____

16. Do the elders succeed in getting you to talk about your walk with God?
    1. Very well.
    2. Quite well.
    3. Somewhat.
    4. Slightly.
    5. Not at all.

    Feel free to explain: _____

    _____

17. During their annual home visits, do the elders usually discuss with you whether or not the preaching helps you to grow spiritually?
    1. Yes.
    2. Sometimes.
    3. Never.

18. During those annual visits, do the elders usually discuss with you the matter of self-examination as described in the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper?[356]
    1. Yes.
    2. Sometimes.
    3. Never.

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[356] *Book of Praise: Anglo-Genevan Psalter* (Winnipeg: Premier Printing, 1993), page 595.

19. Do you usually find the annual home visits by the elders helpful?
    1. Yes.
    2. Sometimes.
    3. Never.

    Feel free to explain: _____

    _____

20. If elders come with instruction, advice or perhaps admonitions, are you prepared to take this seriously?
    1. Yes.
    2. It depends on who visits me.
    3. No.

    Feel free to explain: _____

    _____

21. If you have a child or children at home, do you find that the elders succeed in getting him/her/them to talk about their walk with God?
    1. Very well.
    2. Quite well.
    3. Somewhat.
    4. Slightly.
    5. Not at all.
    6. Not applicable.

    Feel free to explain: _____

    _____

22. If you have a child or children at home, what do you think you could do and what could the elders do to improve communication between the children and the elders? Feel free to discuss this with your child(ren)!

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

    _____

23. You find that during the annual home visit elders usually talk:
    1. Enough.
    2. Not enough.
    3. Too much.

    Feel free to explain: _____

    _____

24. You find that during the annual home visit elders usually listen:
    1. Well.
    2. Reasonably well.
    3. Not enough.

25. How often does your elder usually stay in touch with you between the annual home visits (e.g. through a visit, a telephone call, or a chat when you happen to meet him)?
    1. Five or more times a year.
    2. Three or four times a year.
    3. Once or twice a year.
    4. Never, or almost never.
    5. Only when special matters arise.

26. Are such informal contacts with your elder meaningful to you or helpful?
    1. Yes.
    2. Sometimes.
    3. Never.

    Feel free to explain: _____

    _____

27. Do you think the amount of informal contact you have with your elder is enough?
    1. Yes.
    2. It could be better.
    3. No.

    Feel free to explain: _____

    _____

28. What do you find the easiest way to communicate with an elder?
    1. Face-to-face.
    2. Face-to-face or by telephone (makes no difference).
    3. By telephone.
    4. By e-mail.
    5. No preference.

29. Do you trust your elder to keep information confidential *(unless he is under obligation to disclose certain facts)?*
    1. Yes.
    2. No.

    Feel free to explain: _____

    _____

30. Which problems would you probably feel free to share with an elder? (Circle all that apply).
    1. Physical problems.
    2. Mental or emotional problems.
    3. Spiritual problems.

As to Questions 31-36 below: Fill in as much as you like. Feel free to use more paper.

31. If you have difficulties in sharing a problem with an elder, what would help you to be more open about this?
    1. _____
    2. _____

32. What sort of problems do you have that you would wish an elder would ask you about or create an opportunity to talk about?
    1. _____
    2. _____

33. What are your best experiences of the work of elders? Why?
    1. _____
    2. _____

34. What are your worst experiences with the work of elders? Why?
    1. _____
    2. _____

35. What can be done to increase the effectiveness of the work of elders so they can do their work in a way that honours God, is faithful to his Word, and benefits the members of the congregation being served, including you?
    1. _____
    2. _____

36. What do you think you can do to increase the effectiveness of the work of the elders?
    1. _____
    2. _____

37. Please indicate your gender:
    1. Male.
    2. Female.

38. Your age:
    1. 15-25 years old
    2. 26-35 years old
    3. 36-45 years old
    4. 46 or older

39. Were you born in Canada?
    1. Yes
    2. No

40. If not, how old were you when you came to Canada?
    1. 1-10 years old.
    2. 11-20 years old.
    3. 21-30 years old.
    4. 31 years old or older.

41. You live:
    1. Alone.
    2. With your spouse.
    3. With your spouse and children.
    4. With child(ren).
    5. With your parents.
    6. With siblings or friend(s).

42. To which church do you belong?
    1. One of the two Canadian Reformed Churches in Carman
    2. One of the two Canadian Reformed Churches in Winnipeg

43. How long have you been a member of the congregation you now belong to?
    1. 1-10 years.
    2. 11-20 years.
    3. 21 years or longer

44. Approximately how many years ago did you make public profession of faith?
    1. 1-10 years ago.
    2. 11-20 years ago.
    3. 21 or more years ago.

45. Have you ever served as an office bearer in the church?
    1. Yes.
    2. No.

46. Are you an office bearer now?
    1. Yes.
    2. No.

47. Do you live in the home of someone who was or is an office bearer?
    1. Yes.
    2. No.

If you would like to make further general comments to assist the elders in their work, please feel free to do so: _____
_____
_____

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

APPENDIX 2: A Survey of Elders

Dear brother,

Along with this letter you will find "A Survey of Elders." Participation in this survey is both *voluntary* and *anonymous*. The answers that you provide will form part of a dissertation project which I am writing as part of the requirements for my Doctor of Ministry Studies at Providence Theological Seminary in Otterburne, Manitoba. This project focuses on the office of elder. This survey differs in various ways from "A Survey of Individual Communicant Members," although there are connections between the two. Those connections will help to identify to what degree the efforts of the elders correspond to certain hopes and expectations on the part of congregation members.

The survey is for elders of the Canadian Reformed Churches of Winnipeg (Grace and Redeemer) and Carman (East and West) who have already served for a year or longer. If you have recently been ordained for the first time, please pass on this survey to someone who has just completed his term of office.

The purpose will be first of all to gain general impressions as to what has helped prepare you for your work as an elder and how you can be helped further. There are also questions about such matters as how visits are conducted and how further contacts are maintained. On the basis of your responses to this survey, it will be possible to draw conclusions about current circumstances and provide recommendations for the future.

In order for the results to be collected and dealt with in an orderly way, the survey should be *filled in by June 1, 2008.* Please put the results in the blank envelope you received together with the survey, seal it, and give to the clerk of your consistory. The responses will be passed on to me together to help preserve anonymity. For this reason, please do not put your name either on the survey or on the envelope. The results are meant to be collected and presented in such a way as to preserve the anonymity of the individual sources. After the project has been completed and officially accepted by the faculty of Providence Theological Seminary, the survey you have filled in will be destroyed.

May the Lord bless the results of this study and use it for the upbuilding of the Church of Jesus Christ.

Your cooperation will be much appreciated.

With pastoral greetings,

Rev. A.J. Pol

A Survey of Elders

Please circle the number of the answer which you feel is applicable or else fill in the blank lines.
If you need more space for comments, please feel free to use another sheet of paper.

1. How long have you already served as an elder?
    1. 1-3 years.
    2. 4-6 years.
    3. 7-9 years.
    4. 10 years or more.

2. When you began as an elder, what did you find most helpful in preparing you for your work?
    1. Books.
    2. Articles in *Diakonia*.
    3. Video / DVD presentation (e.g. the video series by Dr. Kloosterman).
    4. Office bearers' conferences.
    5. Conversations with fellow elders.
    6. Conversations with relatives or friends who have served as elder.
    7. Other: _____

3. Have you used "Diakonia," a publication available to office bearers of the Canadian Reformed Churches? If so, did you find it helpful?
    1. Yes.
    2. Sometimes.
    3. No.
    4. Not applicable since I don't read it.

    Feel free to explain:

    _____

    _____

    _____

4. When you began your work as an elder, did you get teamed up with an experienced elder for visiting members in their homes?
    1. Yes.
    2. No.

5. Was it beneficial for you to pay visits together with an experienced elder?
    1. Yes.
    2. Sometimes.
    3. No.
    4. Not applicable.

    Feel free to explain:

    _____

    _____

6. Do you generally experience good teamwork with your fellow elder when visiting members of the congregation?
   1. Yes.
   2. Sometimes.
   3. No.

   Feel free to explain:

   _____
   _____
   _____

7. What do you think would be helpful to equip you further in your work as elder? (Circle every item that you personally find do-able).
   1. Intensive instruction prior to beginning the work.
   2. A seminar/presentation twice a year.
   3. An annual full day seminar/presentation during an office bearers' conference.
   4. An annual half day seminar/presentation during an office bearers' conference.
   5. Some instruction/discussion at each meeting of the office bearers.

   Feel free to explain or offer other ideas:

   _____
   _____
   _____

8. Do you prepare for visits by discussing beforehand with a fellow elder what your objectives will be?
   1. Yes.
   2. Sometimes.
   3. No.

9. If you visit as an elder to admonish a person, have you encountered significant obstacles in yourself in being able to do this as needed?
   1. Yes.
   2. Sometimes.
   3. No.

   Feel free to explain:

   _____
   _____
   _____

10. When going on the annual home visit, do you usually make use of a prearranged discussion topic as a way to get a conversation going?
   1. Yes.
   2. Sometimes.
   3. No.

11. If you use a prearranged discussion topic, do you usually find it helpful?
   1. Yes.
   2. Sometimes.
   3. No.

   Feel free to explain:

   _____

   _____

   _____

12. Do you usually make use of a list of questions (either written or kept in mind) when you going on annual home visits?
   1. Yes.
   2. Sometimes.
   3. No.

13. Which of the following issues do you often ask questions about or address during visits? (Circle any or all items below that apply).
   1. Relationship with God.
   2. Doubts concerning salvation.
   3. What their motivation is to serve God.
   4. How often they read the Bible.
   5. How often they pray.
   6. How they prepare for worship services.
   7. Their church attendance.
   8. Whether or not the preaching helps them to grow spiritually.
   9. Self-examination (as in the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper).
   10. Their commitment to being a living member of the church.
   11. How connected they feel as a member of the church.
   12. Whether or not they attend a Bible study group.
   13. Membership in a committee or volunteer group (includes choir).
   14. Whether or not they have friends in the church.
   15. Whether or not they talk with fellow church members about the Christian faith.
   16. Whether or not they talk with people outside the church community about the faith.
   17. How they view the role of hospitality in the Christian life.
   18. Voluntary financial contributions to the local church.
   19. How things are going being married / single.
   20. How things are going with the children (if there are children).

21. How things are going at work.
22. Leisure activities and entertainment.
23. Particular problems that they would like to share with the elders.
24. Other matters? _____

14. Do you take the initiative to ask direct questions during home visits about such topics as listed above?
    1. Yes, this is how I usually approach matters in a visit.
    2. No, I usually approach things indirectly, drawing conclusions as the conversation progresses.
    3. I use both approaches. I ask direct questions and also invite general discussion on certain topics to see how people think and feel.

Feel free to explain:

_____
_____
_____

15. What is the *average* number of times you deliberately stay in touch with people/families in your ward aside from the annual home visit? (This includes a visit, a telephone call, or a chat when you happen to meet them.)
    1. Five or more times a year.
    2. Three or four times a year.
    3. Once or twice a year.
    4. Only when special matters arise.

16. If children in your ward have graduated from high school, do you usually know what they are doing now and how things are going?
    1. Yes.
    2. Sometimes.
    3. No.
    4. Not applicable.

17. In general, are you able to do your work as elder with joy?
    1. Yes.
    2. Sometimes.
    3. No.

Feel free to explain:

_____
_____
_____

18. What do you find to be the most rewarding aspects of your work as elder? (Fill in as much as you like. Feel free to use more paper.)
    1. _____
    2. _____
    3. _____

19. What do you find to be the most difficult aspects of your work as elder? Why? (Fill in as much as you like. Feel free to use more paper.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

20. What kind of an impact has your work as elder had on your family?
   1. A positive impact.
   2. A negative impact.
   3. Both a positive and a negative impact.

   Feel free to explain:

   _____
   _____
   _____

21. If you would be interested in a presentation for elders or a manual, which topics or problems that you have dealt with as an elder would you like to see addressed? (Fill in as many as you like. Feel free to use more paper.)

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Feel free to add further comments on this page or on a separate sheet of paper.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

APPENDIX 3: The Respondents and their Background

The respondents are from two rural churches and two city churches in Manitoba. Some of the information gathered from the Survey of Individual Communicant Members (see Appendix One) is not directly relevant as input for the work of elders. Nevertheless, it is important for anyone who wishes to know more details about the members who responded to the survey.

The table below is based on the responses to question 37 of the Survey of Individual Communicant Members. It shows in the "Total" column that approximately 45% of the respondents were men, while 55% of them were women. That is a difference of 10%. In varying degrees, women who responded to the surveys showed the desire to be "heard" by the elders. One complaint was that during home visits the elders tend to pay more attention to the male heads of the families.

Table 20. Gender and church membership

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Male	46.6	40.0	45.8	48.3	44.7	117
Female	53.4	60.0	54.2	51.7	55.3	145
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	58	85	59	60		262

The respondents come from various age categories (question 38), as can be seen below, with the largest group (116 of 261 who indicated their age, or 44%) being those who are "46 or older." It is interesting to note, however, that the response rate of this group was highest in the rural churches, although those in the urban churches are also well represented. Also worth noting in the next table is that the response rate of the 15 to

25 years old group was relatively higher among the members of the urban churches than among those in rural areas.

Table 21. Age and church membership

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
15-25 years old	10.5	14.1	16.9	25.0	16.5	43
26-35 years old	17.5	18.8	18.6	16.7	18.0	47
36-45 years old	15.8	18.8	25.4	25.0	21.1	55
46 or older	56.1	48.2	39.0	33.3	44.4	116
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	57	85	59	60		261

The responses to question 41 ("You live...") indicate that the largest group of respondents consists of married members who live at home with their children.

Table 22. Living alone or with family

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Alone	1.8	7.1	7.1	1.7	4.7	12
With your spouse	26.8	22.6	19.6	18.6	22.0	56
With your spouse and children	58.9	52.4	64.3	66.1	59.6	152
With child(ren)	0.0	2.4	0.0	1.7	1.2	3
With your parents	12.5	11.9	8.9	11.9	11.4	29
With siblings or friend(s)	0.0	3.6	0.0	0.0	1.2	3
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	56	84	56	59		255

There was apparently some confusion among some respondents when answering the question 43: "How long have you been a member of the church you now belong to?" Both in Carman and in Winnipeg the congregations were originally united. Because they grew too large for the buildings in which they gathered, the members were divided into two groups and new churches were instituted in each place. The responses to the question how long they have been a member therefore has limited validity, since some may have been thinking of their membership in a newly instituted church while others were thinking in terms of the "church" in a more general sense of "in Carman" or "in Winnipeg."

Table 23. Length of church membership

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
1-10 years	16.4	45.2	21.4	52.6	35.3	89
11-20 years	23.6	17.9	37.5	24.6	25.0	63
21 years or longer	60.0	36.9	41.1	22.8	39.7	100
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	55	84	56	57		252

Another way to get an idea as to which categories of people responded is to look at them in terms of when they made public profession of faith (question 44), thereby becoming "communicant" members of the church who have the right to participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Table 24. Date of public profession of faith

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
1-10 years ago	15.8	20.2	25.0	31.0	22.7	58
11-20 years ago	22.8	21.4	35.7	19.0	24.3	62
21 or more years ago	61.4	58.3	39.3	50.0	52.9	135
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	57	84	56	58		255

It is also interesting to look at the background of the respondents. A significant number of them have an immigrant background. This is because the Canadian Reformed Churches in Manitoba were started by immigrants from the Netherlands, the first being established in 1951 in Carman and the second in Winnipeg in 1953. Since the institution of the first Canadian Reformed Churches in Carman and Winnipeg, quite a few members have been born in Canada. This is reflected in the responses to question 39.

Table 25. Born in Canada

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	62.5	53.0	75.0	76.3	65.4	166
No	37.5	47.0	25.0	23.7	34.6	88
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	56	83	56	59		254

It should be noted that the table above does not reflect the total composition of the churches, since it does not include the children (non-communicant members who have

not yet made public profession of faith). In most cases those not born in the Netherlands

do not understand much of the Dutch language if at all. Not all have a Dutch background

either. At most, their home environment has been influenced by the Dutch immigrant

background of their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents.

Another question relevant to the background of the respondents if they were not

born in Canada is how old they were when they came to this country (question 40).

Table 26. Approximate age upon immigration

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
1-10 years old	33.3	33.3	35.7	42.9	35.2	31
11-20 years old	42.9	17.9	35.7	7.1	25.0	22
21-30 years old	9.5	23.1	14.3	28.6	19.3	17
31 years old or older	14.3	25.6	14.3	21.4	20.5	18
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	21	39	14	14		88

It is interesting to note in the table above that the congregations R2 and C2 have

significantly higher numbers of immigrants who were older upon arrival (i.e. either

belonging to the 21 to 30 years old group or the 31 years and older group). They could

belong to the first waves of Dutch immigrants who came fifty or sixty years ago. They

may also be immigrants who have arrived more recently. It is worth keeping in mind that

such people could have greater difficulty adapting to Canadian society than those who

immigrated at a younger age. In any case, the percentages show that the age at which

these people immigrated to Canada does not necessarily affect whether they ended up

living in a rural or urban area.

It is not surprising that more than 20% of the individual communicant members

who took the time to fill in the surveys have served as office bearers (question 45). In the

Canadian Reformed Churches elders and deacons serve for a limited number of years and

are not necessarily re-elected. This means that a substantial number of men have served

in either office at one time or another. They would tend to be quite interested in

responding to a survey focussing on the work of elders.

Table 27. Past service as an office bearer

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	29.6	20.5	16.1	25.4	22.6	57
No	70.4	79.5	83.9	74.6	77.4	195
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	54	83	56	59		252

Of course, it is also useful to know how many of the respondents are currently

serving as an office bearer (question 46). As can be seen in the table below, a total of 24

of 251 members or almost 10% of the respondents are either an elder or a deacon.

Table 28. Currently serving as an office bearer

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	15.1	6.1	5.4	13.6	9.6	24
No	84.9	93.9	94.6	86.4	90.4	226
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	53	82	56	59		250

Almost 53% of the respondents live in the home of someone who was or is an

office bearer (question 47). Their interest in the work of elders is to be expected. On the

one hand one can assume that their expectations of someone serving in that office will be

tempered by realism, knowing what work this entails. Because of their awareness of the

responsibilities of eldership, their expectations may also be more specific and better

articulated. It should therefore not be concluded that their participation in the survey

invalidates the outcome. They are also members of the congregation with specific needs

and expectations. Since they form a sub-group among the respondents, it is possible to

see if being in the home of someone who was or is an office bearer has an impact on

some of their answers as compared with those of others.

Table 29. Living with someone who was or is an office bearer

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	61.1	54.8	38.2	55.9	52.8	133
No	38.9	45.2	61.8	44.1	47.2	119
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	54	84	55	59		252

APPENDIX 4: Statistical Data for Chapter 4

Connectedness

Table 30. How connected the person feels as a church member

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Very well connected	19.7	13.8	16.9	38.3	21.3	57
Quite well connected	39.3	47.1	33.9	26.7	37.8	101
Connected	31.1	25.3	35.6	26.7	29.2	78
Somewhat disconnected	6.6	13.8	8.5	6.7	9.4	25
Very disconnected	3.3	0.0	5.1	1.7	2.2	6
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	87	59	60		267

Proportionately less of the respondents in "C1" live in homes of someone who is or was an office bearer. That can account for some of the discrepancy between how connected people in C1 feel as compared to C2. However, there is still a significant gap between those two congregations, especially given that the level of involvement of those members in other activities is very similar to what can be seen in the other congregations.

Connectedness and Bible Reading or Prayer

Is there a correlation between Bible reading or prayer and how connected such people feel in regard to others?

Table 31. Bible reading and feeling connected as a church member.

	Very well connected	Quite well connected	Connected	Somewhat disconnected	Very disconnected	Total %	N
More than three times a day	21.4	19.2	9.2	8.0	0.0	15.3	40
Two or three times a day	62.5	64.6	61.8	68.0	66.7	63.7	167
Once a day	16.1	13.1	26.3	16.0	16.7	17.9	47
Now and then and on Sundays	0.0	3.0	2.6	8.0	16.7	3.1	8
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	56	99	76	25	6		262

Especially when the totals of the first two rows of the columns in the table above are summed up, one can see that a higher frequency of Bible reading correlates in a positive way with how connected someone feels as a church member. A similar pattern emerges in regard to the frequency of prayer.

Table 32. Prayer and feeling connected as church member

	Very well connected	Quite well connected	Connected	Somewhat disconnected	Very disconnected	Total %	N
Often, besides at mealtimes	38.2	23.0	22.7	28.0	16.7	26.4	69
Once or twice a day besides at mealtimes	58.2	68.0	64.0	52.0	66.7	63.2	165
At mealtimes	3.6	9.0	12.0	20.0	0.0	9.6	25
Now and then	0.0	0.0	1.3	0.0	16.7	0.8	2
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	55	100	75	25	6		261

Connectedness and Worship Services

The following table shows that the more activity there is in preparation for Sunday worship services, the more likely it is that someone will feel connected as member of the church.

Table 33. Preparation for worship services and feeling connected

	Very well connected	Quite well connected	Connected	Somewhat disconnected	Very disconnected	Total %	N
I pray at home or before the worship services begin	19.6	15.2	16.0	12.0	0.0	15.7	41
I read the text in church before the service starts	0.0	3.0	0.0	4.0	0.0	1.5	4
I try to get enough sleep	8.9	10.1	22.7	8.0	33.3	13.8	36
I don't usually prepare in any special way at all	3.6	3.0	13.3	24.0	16.7	8.4	22
Other or a combination of the above	67.9	68.7	48.0	52.0	50.0	60.5	158
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	56	99	75	25	6		261

Some respondents made use of the opportunity to explain how they prepared. A few indicated that they pray for the minister in regard to the proclamation of the Word as well as for the elders and deacons in their tasks. A few others mentioned reading the text

at home, while one mentioned praying "for the Spirit to work it in my heart." Another

respondent who feels "connected" noted in preparation for the Sunday worship services

that next to trying to get enough sleep and sometimes praying, preparation for Sunday's

also involves thinking about the church services and "what it really means."

One member who feels "quite well connected" mentioned trying to have personal

devotions before the worship services and also singing songs while getting ready. She

also expressed the desire for "more spiritual connectedness," but explained: "I don't risk

open communication which would promote this."

A few mothers described preparations the night before, such as getting things

prepared the night before, i.e. clothes for the children, baking and having soup made for

the Sunday afternoon meal, the table set, enough time for family breakfast and devotions,

and music to set tone for worship and praise. As another put it, preparation involves

"having a mindset and preparations that makes Sunday a day different than the others."

The following table shows that those who go to church more often also tend to

feel more connected as member of the church than those who attend services less

frequently.

Table 34. Frequency of church attendance and feeling connected

	Very well connected	Quite well connected	Connected	Somewhat disconnected	Very disconnected	Total %	N
Twice each Sunday	96.5	93.2	85.9	72.0	50.0	88.8	239
Once each Sunday	1.8	3.9	9.0	12.0	33.3	6.3	17
A few times a month	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.0	16.7	0.7	2
Once or twice each Sunday	1.8	2.9	5.1	12.0	0.0	4.1	11
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	57	103	78	25	6		269

In the preceding table there are 25 respondents who feel "somewhat

disconnected" and 6 who feel "very disconnected." A significant number of them

(respectively 72% and 50%) do attend church twice each Sunday. This shows that while

church attendance may be helpful in strengthening a sense of connectedness not only with God but also with other members, it is not the only factor which needs consideration.

Connectedness and Participation

Another question that merits investigation is whether members are part of a Bible study group, committee, or other church-related activity and to see if this has any bearing on how connected they feel as member of the church.

Table 35. Participation and church membership

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	70.5	71.3	79.7	78.3	74.5	199
Sometimes	8.2	17.2	13.6	13.3	13.5	36
No	21.3	11.5	6.8	8.3	12.0	32
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	87	59	60		267

Table 36. Participation and feeling connected as church member

	Very well connected	Quite well connected	Connected	Somewhat disconnected	Very disconnected	Total %	N
Yes	87.7	78.6	66.7	60.0	50.0	74.7	201
Sometimes	7.0	13.6	17.9	12.0	16.7	13.4	36
No	5.3	7.8	15.4	28.0	33.3	11.9	32
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	57	103	78	25	6		269

Interaction with Others

People as well as congregations vary in the degree to which they interact with others. Question 10 ("Do you talk with fellow church members about the Christian faith when suitable opportunities arise?") sought to gauge to what degree members talk about the Christian faith with fellow church members. This can be compared to how much this takes place in regard to people outside the church (question 11). It is striking that the difference between various congregations in regards to internal interaction is not necessarily paralleled by a similar difference in regard to interaction with outsiders.

Table 37. Interaction with church members about the Christian faith

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	73.8	77.0	67.8	78.0	74.4	198
Sometimes	26.2	23.0	30.5	22.0	25.2	67
Never	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.4	1
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	87	59	59		266

Table 38. Interaction with outsiders about the Christian faith

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	42.6	41.4	29.3	30.0	36.5	97
Sometimes	49.2	55.2	65.5	66.7	58.6	156
Never	8.2	3.4	5.2	3.3	4.9	13
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	87	58	60		266

Table 39. Hospitality is an important part of the Christian life

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	96.7	96.6	93.2	96.6	95.9	255
I'm not sure	3.3	3.4	6.8	3.4	4.1	11
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	87	59	59		266

Connectedness and Immigrant Background

Table 40. Feeling connected as church member and birth in Canada

	Yes	No	Total %	N
Very well connected	22.8	19.3	21.6	55
Quite well connected	35.9	42.0	38.0	97
Connected	29.3	29.5	29.4	75
Somewhat disconnected	8.4	9.1	8.6	22
Very disconnected	3.6	0.0	2.4	6
Total %	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	167	88		255

Connectedness, Gender and Age

While in the overall picture for all the age groups 64% of the male members feel "very well connected" or "quite well connected," this is only true for 56% of the female members. However, the discrepancy is reversed among those who feel "connected," with 25% of the men feeling "connected" as compared to 32% of the women.

Table 41. Feeling connected as a church member and gender

	Male	Female	Total %	N
Very well connected	23.7	19.9	21.6	57
Quite well connected	40.7	36.3	38.3	101
Connected	24.6	32.9	29.2	77
Somewhat disconnected	9.3	8.2	8.7	23
Very disconnected	1.7	2.7	2.3	6
Total %	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	118	146		264

It is possible to analyse the question of connectedness according to gender and age in order to see if the statistics remain steady or fluctuate depending on the age bracket. Analysis shows that between the ages of 15 to 25, the men tend to feel more connected.

Table 42. Feeling connected and gender at 15 to 25 yrs.

	Male	Female	Total %	N
Very well connected	30.0	13.0	20.9	9
Quite well connected	35.0	30.4	32.6	14
Connected	35.0	47.8	41.9	18
Somewhat disconnected	0.0	8.7	4.7	2
Very disconnected	0.0	0.0	0.0	0
Total %	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	20	23		43

The same applies to those in the 26 to 35 year bracket.

Table 43. Feeling connected and gender at 26 to 35 yrs.

	Male	Female	Total %	N
Very well connected	22.7	16.0	19.1	9
Quite well connected	50.0	24.0	36.2	17
Connected	13.6	40.0	27.7	13
Somewhat disconnected	9.1	16.0	12.8	6
Very disconnected	4.5	4.0	4.3	2
Total %	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	22	25		47

The men who are 46 and older also tend to feel more connected than the women.

Table 44. Feeling connected and gender at 46 and older

	Male	Female	Total %	N
Very well connected	26.9	21.5	23.9	28
Quite well connected	40.4	43.1	41.9	49
Connected	25.0	26.2	25.6	30
Somewhat disconnected	7.7	6.2	6.8	8
Very disconnected	0.0	3.1	1.7	2
Total %	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	52	65		117

However in the 36 to 45 year old category the women feel significantly more connected than the men. This is evident in the next table.

Table 45. Feeling connected and gender at 36 to 45 yrs.

	Male	Female	Total %	N
Very well connected	13.0	24.2	19.6	11
Quite well connected	39.1	36.4	37.5	21
Connected	21.7	30.3	26.8	15
Somewhat disconnected	21.7	6.1	12.5	7
Very disconnected	4.3	3.0	3.6	2
Total %	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	23	33		56

When examining the data only from the perspective of age categories the overall picture is as follows.

Table 46. Feeling connected and age

	15-25 years old.	26-35 years old	36-45 years old	46 or older	Total %	N
Very well connected	20.9	19.1	19.6	23.9	21.7	57
Quite well connected	32.6	36.2	37.5	41.9	38.4	101
Connected	41.9	27.7	26.8	25.6	28.9	76
Somewhat disconnected	4.7	12.8	12.5	6.8	8.7	23
Very disconnected	0.0	4.3	3.6	1.7	2.3	6
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	43	47	56	117		263

Connectedness and Elder Visits

The next two tables give reason to conclude that there is a correlation between the frequency of contact between elders and congregation members and their sense of

connectedness. A table referred to earlier is presented once again below as a point of

departure for the discussion.

Table 47. How connected the person feels as a church member

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Very well connected	19.7	13.8	16.9	38.3	21.3	57
Quite well connected	39.3	47.1	33.9	26.7	37.8	101
Connected	31.1	25.3	35.6	26.7	29.2	78
Somewhat disconnected	6.6	13.8	8.5	6.7	9.4	25
Very disconnected	3.3	0.0	5.1	1.7	2.2	6
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	87	59	60		267

When the rows indicating feeling "very well connected" and "quite well

connected" are combined, the percentages in the four congregations are: R1: 59%;

R2: 61%; C1: 51% and C2: 65%. The percentages below in congregations R1, R2 and C2

in regard to the frequency of informal contacts with the elders between the annual home

visits correlate well with the percentages noted concerning connectedness. Combining the

rows indicating "three or four times a year" with "five or more times a year," yields the

following percentages in the four congregations: R1: 33%; R2: 36%; C1: 38%; and C2:

43%. Congregation C1 is the exception to the pattern. Despite the fact that the elders

maintain an average number of informal contacts compared to the other congregations,

there is less of a sense of connectedness among the members. This gives grounds to

hypothesize that other factors are influencing the outcome in that congregation.

Table 48. Frequency of informal contacts with elders

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Five or more times a year	16.4	15.7	17.2	19.0	16.9	44
Three or four times a year	16.4	20.5	20.7	24.1	20.4	53
Once or twice a year	26.2	30.1	20.7	19.0	24.6	64
Never, or almost never	14.8	10.8	20.7	25.9	17.3	45
Only when special matters arise	26.2	22.9	20.7	12.1	20.8	54
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	83	58	58		260

The data concerning the frequency of informal contact between elders and

congregation members shows a correlation with their sense of connectedness as church

members.

Table 49. Connectedness and frequency of contact with an elder

	Five or more times a year	Three or four times a year	Once or twice a year	Never, or almost never	Only when special matters arise	Total %	N
Very well connected	40.0	20.8	13.8	20.0	16.7	21.4	56
Quite well connected	33.3	56.6	47.7	13.3	29.6	37.4	98
Connected	17.8	15.1	29.2	48.9	37.0	29.4	77
Somewhat disconnected	6.7	7.5	7.7	13.3	13.0	9.5	25
Very disconnected	2.2	0.0	1.5	4.4	3.7	2.3	6
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	45	53	65	45	54		262

The Annual Home Visit

The number of members in congregations R1, R2, and C2 who prepare

themselves for the annual home visit by prayer or giving thought to what they might want

to discuss with the elders are quite comparable while the percentage in C1 is lower.

Table 50. Preparation by members for the annual home visit

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	75.4	73.3	64.4	79.3	73.1	193
Sometimes	19.7	22.1	35.6	19.0	23.9	63
No	4.9	4.7	0.0	1.7	3.0	8
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	86	59	58		264

The differences between C1 and the other columns may be partly accounted for

by a relatively lower number of respondents in that congregation living in a home of

someone who has served or is serving as an office bearer, as indicated in a previous table.

When members do not prepare themselves, this will tend to have a negative

impact on the quality of such a visit. This can be seen by examining the next table, which

shows that if members do not prepare themselves for the annual home visit, there is a

significantly higher possibility that they will rate the visit as being only "sometimes" or

"never" helpful as compared to those who have given thought to what they might want to

discuss with the elders.

Table 51. Preparation and the helpfulness of the annual home visit

	Yes	Sometimes	Never	Total	N
Yes	81.1	66.9	64.7	73.6	195.0
Sometimes	16.5	31.4	23.5	23.8	63.0
No	2.4	1.7	11.8	2.6	7.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	
Number of respondents	127.0	121.0	17.0		265.0

In the Survey of the Elders, the responses to question 10 show that the majority of

the elders make use of a certain topic during their annual home visit.

Table 52. A prearranged discussion topic during annual home visits

	R1	R2	C1	C2	N
Yes.	7	7	2	2	18
Sometimes.	0	0	1	2	3
No.	0	0	2	3	5
Number of Respondents (elders)	7	7	5	7	26

Question 11 of the Survey of Elders was meant to assess how helpful elders think

a prearranged discussion topic is. The results can be found in the next table.

Table 53. Do elders find a prearranged discussion topic helpful?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	N
- (no response) -	0	0	1	2	3
Yes.	6	6	2	3	17
Sometimes.	1	1	1	1	4
No.	0	0	1	1	2
Number of Respondents (elders)	7	7	5	7	26

Question 15 in the Survey of Individual Communicant Members was formulated

to encourage members to voice their thoughts about whether or not they think it is helpful

to have a prearranged discussion topic when elders come for the annual home visit.

Table 54. Is a prearranged discussion topic helpful?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	72.1	64.7	43.1	55.9	59.7	157
Undecided	9.8	25.9	36.2	37.3	27.0	71
No	18.0	9.4	20.7	6.8	13.3	35
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	85	58	59		263

Self-examination

There is some variation among the congregations in regard to whether or not self-examination as described in the Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper has been discussed with the members. This can be seen in the next table. The most noteworthy discrepancy is the one between congregations C1 and C2, where almost 40% of the respondents in C1 indicate never having discussed self-examination with the elders, as compared to almost 21% of those in C2.

Table 55. Does self-examination get discussed?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	6.7	9.5	8.6	22.4	11.5	30
Sometimes	60.0	64.3	51.7	56.9	58.8	153
Never	33.3	26.2	39.7	20.7	29.6	77
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	60	84	58	58		260

Regular Voluntary Financial Contributions

Question 13 of the Survey of Individual Communicant Members solicited responses to the question "Aside from collections for the needy, do you / does your spouse give regular voluntary financial contributions to the local church?"

Table 56. Giving regular voluntary financial contributions

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	93.4	88.2	86.4	93.3	90.2	239
I / we would like to contribute, but I'm / we are not earning enough	3.3	1.2	5.1	0.0	2.3	6
I / we contribute, but it should be more	1.6	10.6	8.5	6.7	7.2	19
No, I / we don't give anything	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.4	1
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	85	59	60		265

In congregation C1, 5% of the respondents would like to give more but can't. If this percentage is then added to the percentage of those who do give, the total is comparable to that in congregations R1 and C2. The overall picture shows there is no large discrepancy between the rural and city congregations. Nevertheless, a significant percentage of respondents indicate that they should be giving more. A question worth considering is therefore whether or not elders address the topic of giving during their visits. Could this have an impact on financial contributions? To answer this, the next table based on the Survey of Elders, should be compared to the previous one. It raises the question whether or not during visits the elders discuss the matter of voluntary financial contributions to the local church.

Table 57. Discussion about voluntary financial contributions?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	N
Yes	6	3	5	7	21
No	1	4	0	0	5
Number of Respondents (elders)	7	7	5	7	26

As can be seen above, all the elders in the two city congregations indicate that they talk about financial contributions and all but one elder does this in congregation R1. In congregation R2, however, four of the seven elders do not discuss financial contributions. This is also the congregation with the highest percentage of respondents who acknowledge that they should be giving more.

Questions Often Raised During Home Visits

Responses to question 12 of the Survey of Elders show that elders often use a list of questions (either written or kept in mind) in their discussions with members during the annual home visits. This is not the same as using a prearranged topic for getting a discussion started.

Table 58. Is a list of questions during annual home visits used?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	N
Yes.	3	1	4	5	13
Sometimes.	4	6	1	2	13
No.	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Respondents (elders)	**7**	**7**	**5**	**7**	**26**

The responses to question 14 of the Survey of Elders give an impression to what

degree they use direct questions during home visits to find out how the members are

doing.

Table 59. Do you use direct questions about various topics?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	N
Yes, this is how I usually approach matters.	2	1	1	2	6
No, I usually approach things indirectly.	0	0	0	0	0
I use both approaches.	5	6	4	5	20
Number of Respondents (elders)	**7**	**7**	**5**	**7**	**26**

Spiritual openness

Adult members

The following table gives an overview of the self-assessment of members in

regard to how successful elders are in getting them to talk about their walk with God.

Table 60. Communicant members talk about their walk with God

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Very well	26.2	9.3	15.3	18.3	16.5	44
Quite well	49.2	59.3	40.7	66.7	54.5	145
Somewhat	21.3	26.7	40.7	15.0	25.9	69
Slightly	3.3	4.7	1.7	0.0	2.6	7
Not at all	0.0	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.4	1
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	86	59	60		266

The first row of this table ("very well") shows considerable variation between the

congregations, with the percentages in the two city congregations being the closest. This

variation continues in the next row, with notable differences between each congregation.

However, the differences between the two rural congregations are less striking when the

percentages for "very well" and "quite well" in each column are added together and then

compared: R1 = 75% and R2 = 69%. Congregation C1 lags behind with 56% and C2 scores a total of 85%.

When contemplating these results, it should not be forgotten that the outcome can be somewhat influenced by the higher percentage of respondents from congregations R1 and C2 who either were or are office bearers or who live in the home of an office bearer. However, the results of the "Survey of Elders" in congregation C1 showed that only three of the five elders directly address the topic of a person's walk with God. This could be reflected in the table above. If elders approach this matter only indirectly, it may become difficult for the members to open up about their spiritual lives.

Those who have been or who are elders or deacons as well as their families can be said to form a special group within the congregations. Their responses to the survey of communicant members may in various ways differ somewhat from those of other members. Their input can still be valuable, so it was decided not to eliminate them as a group from those responding to the survey of communicant members. However, since at least some of their responses could skew the general results, a question has been added to identify those members as a sub-group. This provides the opportunity for some comparison and can potentially help eliminate skewed statistics.

The total number of respondents in the next table does not correspond exactly to the preceding one since it does not include respondents who did not indicate whether or not they lived in the home of someone who has served or is serving as an office bearer. The point is to find out what kind of a correlation there may be between whether elders succeed in getting members to talk about their walk with God (rows), and whether or not they live in the home of someone who is or was an office bearer (columns).

Table 61. Openness and home background

	Yes	No	Total %	N
Very well	12.7	23.7	17.9	45
Quite well	64.9	41.5	54.0	136
Somewhat	20.9	31.4	25.8	65
Slightly	1.5	2.5	2.0	5
Not at all	0.0	0.8	0.4	1
Total %	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	134	118		252

The percentages in the first row show a remarkable difference. Almost twice as many members who are not from the homes of people who have served or are serving as office bearers indicate that the elders succeed "very well" in getting them to talk about their walk with God. The difference is reversed in the next row.

Children

The table below gives an overview of the responses of parents to question 21 of the Survey of Individual Communicant Members. Comparison with table 60 shows that elders are generally more able to get communicant members to talk about their walk with God than they are able to get children to do this.

Table 62. Children talk about their walk with God

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Very well	3.6	4.0	7.4	0.0	3.9	5
Quite well	32.1	42.0	37.0	56.5	41.4	53
Somewhat	57.1	32.0	44.4	30.4	39.8	51
Slightly	3.6	12.0	7.4	8.7	8.6	11
Not at all	3.6	2.0	3.7	4.3	3.1	4
It depends...	0.0	8.0	0.0	0.0	3.1	4
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	28	50	27	23		128

Problem Sharing

The responses to question 30 of the Survey of Individual Communicant Members give an impression as to what kind of problems people would be likely to share with elders. The various combinations of answers are reflected in the following table.

Table 63. Problems likely to be shared with elders

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Physical problems	18.0	10.3	17.9	8.8	13.4	35
Spiritual problems	21.3	17.2	8.9	12.3	15.3	40
Physical, mental, or emotional problems	0.0	0.0	1.8	8.8	2.3	6
Physical or spiritual problems	3.3	6.9	10.7	7.0	6.9	18
Mental, emotional or spiritual problems	4.9	3.4	8.9	3.5	5.0	13
Physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual problems	32.8	41.4	41.1	54.4	42.1	110
Which problems I share would depend on the elder	3.3	6.9	5.4	0.0	4.2	11
I would not feel free to share such problems with an elder	16.4	13.8	5.4	5.3	10.7	28
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	87	56	57		261

The low percentage of members who would feel free to share physical, mental, or emotional problems with their elder is not necessarily because they do not trust them. The next table makes that clear.

Table 64. Trusting the elders to maintain confidentiality

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	81.7	85.4	83.1	87.9	84.6	219
No	15.0	9.8	15.3	12.1	12.7	33
It depends on who the elder is	3.3	4.9	1.7	0.0	2.7	7
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	60	82	59	58		259

Responsiveness

The following table gives an impression in response to the question "If elders come with instruction, advice or perhaps admonitions, are you prepared to take this seriously?"

Table 65. Positive response to the elders?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	86.2	87.2	81.0	88.1	85.8	224
It depends on who visits me	13.8	12.8	19.0	11.9	14.2	37
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	58	86	58	59		261

In retrospect, the first variable ("Yes,") could have been amplified to clarify that the underlying assumption is that the elders come with biblically-based "instruction,

advice or perhaps admonitions." This became apparent when one member qualified his "yes" answer by explaining "when biblically sound and with a spirit of humility." In response to the option "It depends on who visits me" one member wrote: "The question has to be 'How they visit me.' Arrogant or bringing God's love and peace with a humble heart."

Confidentiality

The responses listed in table 65 in regard to the question about confidentiality show that not everyone is sure what they tell elders will stay with the elders. The following table shows that it is more likely that members will trust the elders to keep information confidential (rows) if they think the amount of informal contact they have with their elder is enough (columns).

Table 66. Trust and informal contact

	Yes	It could be better	No	Total %	N
Yes	89.1	86.0	65.7	84.9	220
No	8.7	10.5	31.4	12.4	32
It depends on who the elder is	2.2	3.5	2.9	2.7	7
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	138	86	35		259

As can be seen in the next table, the level of trust (rows) increases slightly depending on how long someone has been a member of a particular church (columns).

Table 67. Trust and length of church membership

	1-10 years	11-20 years	21 years or longer	Total %	N
Yes	81.8	88.7	86.6	85.4	211
No	15.9	9.7	11.3	12.6	31
It depends on who the elder is	2.3	1.6	2.1	2.0	5
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	88	62	97		247

People are somewhat more likely to trust their elder to keep information confidential (rows) if they have served as an office bearer themselves (columns).

Table 68. Trust and personal experience as an office bearer

	Yes	No	Total %	N
Yes	89.1	84.7	85.7	210
No	9.1	13.2	12.2	30
It depends on who the elder is	1.8	2.1	2.0	5
Total %	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	55	190		245

Make Informal Contacts Count

Elders often try to stay in touch with people/families in their wards aside from the annual home visit by means of an extra visit, a telephone call, or a chat when they happen to meet them. Since a few elders indicated that their contacts vary, depending on circumstances, their responses were added in a separate row below.

Table 69. Individual elders seek informal contact with ward members

	R1	R2	C1	C2	N
Five or more times a year.	1	2	0	2	5
Three or four times a year.	4	3	4	2	13
Once or twice a year.	0	1	1	2	4
Varies	2	1	0	1	3
Number of Respondents (elders)	7	7	5	7	26

It is interesting to compare the efforts of the elders to the assessment of the members of the four congregations. Do they think the amount of informal contact they have with their elder is enough? Half or more of the members in R1 and C1 feel there is room for improvement; congregations R2 and C2 fare slightly better.

Table 70. Is the amount of informal contact with the elders enough?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	47.5	54.8	50.0	58.6	52.9	138
It could be better	41.0	33.3	27.6	32.8	33.7	88
No	11.5	11.9	22.4	8.6	13.4	35
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	84	58	58		261

The next table shows that a higher frequency of contact contributes to more open discussion. The degree two which elders succeed in getting members to talk about their walk with God (rows) is positively correlated to how often there is informal contact

(columns). This becomes especially evident when the percentages in the two rows

indicating "very well" and "quite well" are added up. From right to left, the approximate

percentages in the columns are then: 93%, 77%, 62%, 58%, and 69%.

Table 71. Openness and frequency of informal contact

	Five or more times a year	Three or four times a year	Once or twice a year	Never, or almost never	Only when special matters arise	Total %	N
Very well	33.3	7.5	9.2	17.8	18.5	16.4	43
Quite well	60.0	69.8	52.3	40.0	50.0	54.6	143
Somewhat	6.7	20.8	33.8	35.6	29.6	26.0	68
Slightly	0.0	1.9	4.6	4.4	1.9	2.7	7
Not at all	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.2	0.0	0.4	1
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	45	53	65	45	54		262

The column of members who have contact with their elder "only when special

matters arise" has a higher combined score (approximately 69%) for elders succeeding

"very well" or "quite well" in getting them to talk about their walk with God than those

who "never, or almost never" have contact (58%). This is undoubtedly because "special

matters" include crises and other events that have an emotional impact.

Are there differences in the frequency of contact between elders and congregation

members when the four congregations are compared? When the top two rows of the next

table above are added up, it becomes apparent that the frequency in the first three

congregations is quite similar, with the exception being congregation C2, where a total of

43% of the respondents indicate that they have either had informal contact "three or four"

or "five or more times a year" with their respective elders.

Table 72. General frequency of informal contact

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Five or more times a year	16.4	15.7	17.2	19.0	16.9	44
Three or four times a year	16.4	20.5	20.7	24.1	20.4	53
Once or twice a year	26.2	30.1	20.7	19.0	24.6	64
Never, or almost never	14.8	10.8	20.7	25.9	17.3	45
Only when special matters arise	26.2	22.9	20.7	12.1	20.8	54
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	83	58	58		260

In the next table, a high percentage of members in congregation C2 indicate that informal contacts with their elders are meaningful or helpful. This correlates with the higher frequency of informal contacts between elders and members in that congregation as compared to the other congregations. This shows that informal contact at least three or four times a year contributes significantly to a higher ratio of members who indicate that they are benefiting from the work of their elders.

Table 73. Informal contacts are meaningful or helpful

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Yes	52.6	60.0	44.0	70.9	57.4	139
Sometimes	43.9	36.3	44.0	23.6	36.8	89
Never	3.5	3.8	12.0	5.5	5.8	14
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	57	80	50	55		242

Does it make a difference as to what kind of informal contact members have with their ward elder? The table below gives an overview of the responses.

Table 74. The easiest way to communicate with an elder

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total %	N
Face-to-face	49.2	47.1	41.4	50.8	47.1	124
Face-to-face or by telephone (makes no difference)	21.3	29.4	34.5	32.2	29.3	77
By telephone	1.6	0.0	1.7	0.0	0.8	2
By e-mail	0.0	2.4	0.0	1.7	1.1	3
No preference	26.2	20.0	19.0	15.3	20.2	53
Face-to-face or by e-mail	1.6	1.2	3.4	0.0	1.5	4
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	
Number of Respondents	61	85	58	59		263

As can be seen in the preceding table, 50% or more of the respondents indicate that it makes no difference to them whether they have contact in a face-to-face visit or by telephone. This is worth keeping in mind as an alternative way to show pastoral care if direct contact is not feasible or possible.

Preparation for Service

Elders generally serve three year terms. That is reflected in the rows of the next table listing years of service. Someone who has served "10 years or more" has already served for at least three full terms.

Table 75. Length of service as an elder

	R1	R2	C1	C2	N
1-3 years.	4	4	1	4	13
4-6 years.	0	1	1	1	3
7-9 years.	0	1	2	0	3
10 years or more.	3	1	1	2	7
Number of Respondents (elders)	**7**	**7**	**5**	**7**	**26**

Question 2 of the Survey of Elders asked these office bearers to indicate what they found most helpful in preparing them for their work. It would have been interesting to rephrase question 2 by asking the elders to put into numerical order what they felt was most helpful. The way it was worded should have led them to circle only one. Many, however, circled more than one. This should be kept in mind when examining the next table. The numbers in the columns pertaining to congregations R1, R2, C1 and C2 refer to how many of the elders in each location responded positively to the item mentioned at the beginning of each row.

Table 76. What helped most in preparing to work as an elder

	R1	R2	C1	C2
1. Books	5	3	1	6
2. Articles in *Diakonia*	2	1	0	3
3. Video/DVD presentation	2	2	2	7
4. Office bearers' conferences	0	1	1	2
5. Conversations with fellow elders	5	5	3	6
6. Conversations with relatives or friends who have served as elder.	2	2	2	5

Question 3 of the Survey focused specifically on the usefulness of *Diakonia,* the

quarterly publication that all the elders subscribe to. The results are displayed in the

following table.

Table 77. Was the periodical *Diakonia* useful?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	N
Yes.	2	2	0	2	6
Sometimes.	4	4	5	4	17
No.	0	1	0	1	2
Not applicable since I don't read it.	1	0	0	0	1
Number of Respondents (elders)	**7**	**7**	**5**	**7**	**26**

The articles available in a periodical called *Diakonia* were deemed less helpful

than books, although two elders offered positive comments: "Very relevant topics and

much to think about," and "Always helpful. To what degree often dependent on specific

issues being faced at a given time." Others acknowledged that there are good articles, but

some were found either to be "too lengthy," "too theological," or "too difficult."

Teamwork

Usually when elders begin their work for the first time, they are teamed up with a

more experienced elder. The next table shows responses to question 4, which sought to

establish whether beginning elders were teamed up with experienced ones.

Table 78. The beginning elder was teamed up with an experienced elder

	R1	R2	C1	C2	N
Yes.	7	7	2	1	17
No.	0	0	3	5	8
(left blank)	0	0	0	1	1
Number of Respondents (elders)	**7**	**7**	**5**	**7**	**26**

Questions 5 sought to determine whether it was beneficial to be teamed up with an experienced elder.

Table 79. Was visiting together with an experienced elder beneficial?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	N
Yes.	7	6	4	4	21
Sometimes.	0	1	0	2	3
No.	0	0	0	0	0
Not applicable.	0	0	1	1	2
Number of Respondents (elders)	7	7	5	7	26

Question 6 invited elders to assess whether they currently experience good teamwork with their fellow elder when visiting members of the congregation.

Table 80. Is there currently good teamwork when visiting?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	N
Yes.	7	7	5	5	24
Sometimes.	0	0	0	2	2
Number of Respondents (elders)	7	7	5	7	26

Question 7 of the Survey of Elders gives the opportunity to assess what could possibly be effective in furthering the development of the elders. The next table gives an overview of the results. The elders were invited to circle every item they would personally find do-able. The numbers at the end of each row represent the totals in those rows.

Table 81. What would be helpful for equipping elders further?

	R1	R2	C1	C2	Total
1. Intensive instruction prior to beginning the work.	2	2	0	1	5
2. A seminar/presentation twice a year.	1	1	0	2	4
3. An annual full day seminar/presentation during an office bearers' conference.	0	2	3	1	6
4. An annual half day seminar/presentation during an office bearers' conference.	2	2	2	2	8
5. Some instruction/discussion at each meeting of the office bearers.	6	4	1	3	14
Number of Respondents (elders)	7	7	5	7	26

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