

## Called to be an Elder

If you have been invited by the nominating committee to consider the call to be an Elder, you may desire a way to think about that call and pray for discernment. It is our hope that this document will assist you in your pursuit of God's will for your life.

Consider these words from Ephesians 4:

***"I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."***

You may wish to pray this prayer from Ephesians 3:

***"For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.***

***Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."***

Now, what exactly is an Elder?

At Arlington Presbyterian Church, an elder is a spiritual leader of the church, one of six elders who comprise the Session – the governing body of the congregation.

Called to be an Elder (cont.)

The Book of Order G-2.03 (Ruling Elders: The Ministry of Discernment and Governance) states the following:

“As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with particular gifts to share in discernment of God’s Spirit and governance of God’s people. Accordingly, congregations should elect persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit. Ruling elders are so named not because they “lord it over” the congregation (Matt. 20:25), but because they are chosen by the congregation to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. Ruling elders, together with teaching elders, exercise leadership, government, spiritual discernment, and discipline and have responsibilities for the life of a congregation as well as the whole church, including ecumenical relationships. When elected by the congregation, they shall serve faithfully as members of the session. When elected as commissioners to higher councils, ruling elders participate and vote with the same authority as teaching elders, and they are eligible for any office.”

As you consider your call, you should be familiar with the **ordination questions** you will be asked and be prepared to answer them in the affirmative. They are as follows (Book of Order W-4.4003):

1. Do you **trust** in Jesus Christ your savior, acknowledge Him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through Him **believe** in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
2. Do you **accept** the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God’s Word to you?
3. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be **instructed** and **led** by those confessions as you lead the people of God?
4. Will you fulfill your ministry in **obedience** to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions?
5. Will you be governed by our church’s polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a **friend** among your colleagues in ministry, work with them, subject to the order of God’s Word and Spirit?
6. Will you in your own life seek to **follow** the Lord Jesus Christ, **love** your neighbors, and **work** for the reconciliation of the world?

Called to be an Elder (cont.)

7. Do you promise to further the **peace, unity, and purity** of the church?
8. Will you pray for and seek to serve the people with **energy, intelligence, imagination, and love**?
9. Will you be a **faithful ruling elder**, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in the councils of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ?

### **What is expected of an Elder at Arlington Presbyterian Church?**

The call to serve in ministry as Elder is a serious one and not to be entered into lightly. The Session serves as the governing body and spiritual leaders of the congregation charged with the responsibility of the ongoing discernment of God's vision for our church. The model for Elder is the ultimate Servant, Jesus Christ.

The term of Elder is typically three (3) years. One considering serving as Elder should be prepared to make commitment for the full-term of their call.

In addition to attendance at our regular monthly Session meetings, participation is expected in ongoing small groups which gather for prayer and study around specific concerns or decisions on a regular basis. In addition each Elder is expected to actively participate in conversations and discussions around key issues and decision-making. It is expected that each Elder's voice will be heard.

In addition, each Elder serves as a Trustee on the Board of Arlington Presbyterian Church Corporation.

Each Elder will attend Presbytery meetings throughout their term with at least one Presbytery meeting attendance required per year. Opportunities for more meetings are likely.

In the second year of an Elder's term, he/she will have an opportunity to serve on the Nominating Committee.

It is understood and expected that each Elder shall strive for growth through a well-grounded spiritual life which involves being engaged in regular times of prayer and Bible study as well as being active in service and faithful in stewardship of their gifts, financial and otherwise.

Called to be an Elder (cont.)

An Elder will be engaged in loving communion and relationship with members and friends of the church.

The following is a list (not exhaustive) of expected behaviors and qualities of an Elder:

- strives daily to follow Jesus Christ
- regularly attends worship
- participates in church activities
- serves faithfully
- exhibits stewardship of time, talents and financial resources
- exhibits Christian living in their daily lives at home, at work and in the community
- exhibits a spirit of cooperation and participation
- shows a willingness to learn
- take risks for the sake of the gospel
- is able to follow through on assignments and communicate results
- is open to new ideas
- is curious about what it means to be church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- exhibits maturity of judgment

Outside of our meetings, the primary means of communication for the Session is through e-mail.

If you are considering the invitation from nominating committee to serve as Elder, know that you are welcome to attend a Session meeting to get a better understanding of how we gather and serve in this ministry.

### **What is the vision of the Session?**

The Session is the keeper of the vision, and is responsible for keeping the “big picture” in focus as we move to make the current vision reality. The Session is charged with the ongoing discernment of God’s vision for Arlington Presbyterian Church. As such, Elder members should be prepared to continue the process of discernment through prayer and study; and be open to the Holy Spirit’s guidance through our continuing transformation.

**Are you called to be an Elder? Together with God and the community, you are invited to discern that call. Through prayer, study in God’s Word and conversation, may God speak to you.**

***“I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing***

Called to be an Elder (cont.)

***greatness of His power toward us who believe.” (Ephesians 1:18-19a)***

From the New Form of Government (free download available from [www.pcusa.org](http://www.pcusa.org))

G-3.02 The Session

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G-3.0201 Composition and Responsibilities

The session is the council for the congregation. It shall be composed of those persons elected by the congregation to active service as ruling elders, together with all installed pastors and associate pastors. All members of the session are entitled to vote. The pastor shall be the moderator of the session, and the session shall not meet without the pastor or designated moderator. If there is no installed pastor, or if the installed pastor is unable to invite another moderator, the presbytery shall make provisions for a moderator. Presbyteries shall provide by rule for moderators when the session is without a moderator for reasons of vacancy or inconvenience.

The session shall have responsibility for governing the congregation and guiding its witness to the sovereign activity of God in the world, so that the congregation is and becomes a community of faith, hope, love, and witness. As it leads and guides the witness of the congregation, the session shall keep before it the marks of the Church (F-1.0302), the notes by which Presbyterian and Reformed congregations have identified themselves throughout history (F-1.0303) and the six Great Ends of the Church (F-1.0304)—(the text of these three citations are included at the end of this document). In light of this charge, the session has responsibility and power to:

a. provide that the Word of God may be truly preached and heard. This responsibility shall include providing a place where the congregation may regularly gather for worship, education, and spiritual nurture; providing for regular preaching of the Word by a teaching elder or other person prepared and approved for the work; planning and leading regular efforts to reach into the community and the world with the message of salvation and the invitation to enter into committed discipleship; planning and leading ministries of social healing and reconciliation in the community in accordance with the prophetic witness of Jesus Christ; and initiating and responding to ecumenical efforts that bear witness to the love and grace of God.

b. provide that the Sacraments may be rightly administered and received. This responsibility shall include authorizing the celebration of the Lord's Supper at least quarterly and the administration of Baptism as appropriate, in accordance with the principles of the Directory for Worship; and exercising pastoral care

Called to be an Elder (cont.)

among the congregation; in order that the Sacraments may be received as a means of grace, and the congregation may live in the unity represented in the Sacraments.

c. nurture the covenant community of disciples of Christ. This responsibility shall include receiving and dismissing members; reviewing the roll of active members at least annually and counseling with those who have neglected the responsibilities of membership; providing programs of nurture, education, and fellowship; training, examining, ordaining, and installing those elected by the congregation as ruling elders and deacons; encouraging the graces of generosity and faithful stewardship of personal and financial resources; managing the physical property of the congregation for the furtherance of its mission; directing the ministry of deacons, trustees, and all organizations of the congregation; employing the administrative staff of the congregation; leading the congregation in participating in the mission of the whole church; warning and bearing witness against error in doctrine and immorality in practice within the congregation and community; and serving in judicial matters in accordance with the Rules of Discipline.

#### F-1.0302 The Marks of the Church

With all Christians of the Church catholic, we affirm that the Church is “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.”

##### a. The Unity of the Church

Unity is God’s gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. Just as God is one God and Jesus Christ is our one Savior, so the Church is one because it belongs to its one Lord, Jesus Christ. The Church seeks to include all people and is never content to enjoy the benefits of Christian community for itself alone. There is one Church, for there is one Spirit, one hope, “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Eph. 4:5–6). Because in Christ the Church is one, it strives to be one. To be one with Christ is to be joined with all those whom Christ calls into relationship with him. To be thus joined with one another is to become priests for one another, praying for the world and for one another and sharing the various gifts God has given to each Christian for the benefit of the whole community. Division into different denominations obscures but does not destroy unity in Christ. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), affirming its historical continuity with the whole Church of Jesus Christ, is committed to the reduction of that obscurity, and is willing to seek and to deepen communion with all other churches within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church.

##### b. The Holiness of the Church

Holiness is God’s gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. Through the love of Christ, by the power of

the Spirit, God takes away the sin of the world. The holiness of the Church comes from Christ who sets it apart to bear witness to his love, and not from the purity of its doctrine or the righteousness of its actions. Because in Christ the Church is holy, the Church, its members, and those in its ordered ministries strive to lead lives worthy of the Gospel we proclaim. In gratitude for Christ's work of redemption, we rely upon the work of God's Spirit through Scripture and the means of grace (W-5.5001) to form every believer and every community for this holy living. We confess the persistence of sin in our corporate and individual lives. At the same time, we also confess that we are forgiven by Christ and called again and yet again to strive for the purity, righteousness, and truth revealed to us in Jesus Christ and promised to all people in God's new creation.

c. The Catholicity of the Church

Catholicity is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. In the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God overcomes our alienation and repairs our division. Because in Christ the Church is catholic, it strives everywhere to testify to Christ's embrace of men, women, and children of all times, places, races, nations, ages, conditions, and stations in life. The catholicity of the Church summons the Church to a deeper faith, a larger hope, and a more complete love as it bears witness to God's grace.

d. The Apostolicity of the Church

Apostolicity is God's gift to the Church in Jesus Christ. In Christ, by the power of the Spirit, God sends the Church into the world to share the gospel of God's redemption of all things and people. Because in Christ the Church is apostolic, it strives to proclaim this gospel faithfully. The Church receives the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ through the testimony of those whom Christ sent, both those whom we call apostles and those whom Christ has called throughout the long history of the Church. The Church has been and is even now sent into the world by Jesus Christ to bear that testimony to others. The Church bears witness in word and work that in Christ the new creation has begun, and that God who creates life also frees those in bondage, forgives sin, reconciles brokenness, makes all things new, and is still at work in the world. To be members of the body of Christ is to be sent out to pursue the mission of God and to participate in God's new creation, God's kingdom drawing the present into itself. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) affirms the Gospel of Jesus Christ as received from the prophets and apostles, and stands in continuity with God's mission through the ages. The Church strives to be faithful to the good news it has received and accountable to the standards of the confessions. The Church seeks to present the claims of Jesus Christ, leading persons to repentance, acceptance of Christ alone as Savior and Lord, and new life as his disciples. The Church is sent to be Christ's faithful evangelist:

- making disciples of all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit;
- sharing with others a deep life of worship, prayer, fellowship, and service;
- and participating in God's mission to care for the needs of the sick, poor, and lonely; to free people from sin, suffering, and oppression; and to establish Christ's just, loving, and peaceable rule in the world.

Where Christ is, there is the true Church. Since the earliest days of the Reformation, Reformed Christians have marked the presence of the true Church wherever:

- the Word of God is truly preached and heard,
- the Sacraments are rightly administered,
- and ecclesiastical discipline is uprightly ministered.

In our own time, we affirm that, in the power of the Spirit, the Church is faithful to the mission of Christ as it:

Proclaims and hears the Word of God,  
responding to the promise of God's new creation in Christ, and inviting all people to participate in that new creation;

Administers and receives the Sacraments,  
welcoming those who are being engrafted into Christ, bearing witness to Christ's saving death and resurrection, anticipating the heavenly banquet that is to come, and committing itself in the present to solidarity with the marginalized and the hungry; and

Nurtures a covenant community of disciples of Christ,  
living in the strength of God's promise and giving itself in service to God's mission.

#### F-1.0304 The Great Ends of the Church

The great ends of the Church are:

- the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind;
- the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God;
- the maintenance of divine worship;
- the preservation of the truth;
- the promotion of social righteousness; and
- the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.