

The Ordination and Installation of Ruling Elders

Book of Government 14-1E

The ordination and installation of a congregation's officers may take place during the usual Sunday morning worship service. Following the preaching of the Word, the person presiding (normally the Pastor) may invite the elected candidates to come forward and stand facing him or her and current members of the Session before the congregation. Having first prayed for God's continuing support and guidance upon the church and the candidates, the person presiding shall give an account of the conditions necessary for serving as an Elder and of the importance of the eldership in the life of the church, using words such as the following "Ordination Preamble:"

The one true and universal church is both invisible and visible. The Invisible Church, which will be the Church Victorious on the great day of Christ's return, is composed of all those who have throughout the ages belonged to Jesus Christ, claiming only Him as Lord and Savior. The Visible Church is the church on earth, sometimes called the Church Militant. It is composed of all those in every place who profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and who, together with their children, submit to His law and lordship. The Visible Church is bound together in its essential unity where scriptural discipline is practiced, where the Word is rightly proclaimed, where the sacraments are properly observed, and where loving fellowship is maintained.

The evangelical church, as part of the Visible Church, believes the perfecting of the order of the Visible Church is best established where the scriptural doctrine of government by presbyters gathered in church courts is practiced. The Lord of the Church, Jesus Christ, has given three offices to the Church. These are ministers of the Word (known as Teaching Elders or Pastors), Ruling Elders, and Deacons. The local church should prayerfully search the Scriptures and choose for officers those who are best qualified. These offices are not indications of special preeminence by those who hold them, but rather indicate a call to service, to ministry, to special discipleship, and the evidencing of the fruit of the Spirit in every part of life.

The local churches of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church are governed by the Session, composed of Ruling Elders elected by the members, and Pastors (or Teaching Elders) called by the congregation. Together, Ruling and Teaching Elders are known as Presbyters.

According to Scripture, those who bear the office of Ruling Elder should be blameless in life, sound in the faith, wise in the things of God, and discreet in all things. Together, the Ruling Elders watch over the spiritual welfare of the congregation. It is the first duty of the Ruling Elder to seek and represent the mind of Christ. As the law of love places certain duties upon each Christian, the Ruling Elder is especially bound to fulfill those duties and to be an example to all.

The members of this congregation have elected you to this high office and you are now required to answer the following prescribed questions.

The person presiding proposes the following questions 1 through 8 for candidates being ordained and installed. Question 8a may be substituted for Questions 1-8 for candidates ordained previously, either in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church or in another Reformed denomination and who are simply being installed. Questions 9- 11 shall be put to all candidates:

1. Do you reaffirm your faith in Jesus Christ as your own personal Lord and Savior?
2. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God, totally trustworthy, fully inspired by the Holy Spirit, the supreme, final and the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
3. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
4. Do you promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with the system of doctrine as taught in the Scriptures and as contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Catechisms of this Church, you will on your own initiative make known to your church Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
5. Do you affirm and adopt the “Essentials of Our Faith” without exception?
6. Do you subscribe to the government and discipline of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church?
7. Do you promise subjection to your fellow Presbyters in the Lord?
8. Have you been induced, as far as you know your own heart, to accept the office of Ruling Elder from love of God and a sincere desire to promote His glory in the gospel of his Son?
- 8a. Do you now reaffirm the vows you took upon your ordination, and do you recommit yourself to them in the discharge of your obligations?
9. Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in promoting the truths of the gospel and the purity and peace of the Church, whatever persecution or opposition may arise to you on that account?
10. Will you seek to be faithful and diligent in the exercise of all your duties as Ruling Elder, whether personal or relative, private or public, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the gospel in your manner of life, and to walk with exemplary piety before this congregation of which God will make you an officer?

11. Are you now willing to take responsibility in the life of this congregation as a Ruling Elder, and will you seek to discharge your duties, relying upon the grace of God, in such a way that the entire Church of Jesus Christ will be blessed?

When the candidates have responded affirmatively to the questions, the person presiding may address the following question to the congregation:

Do you, the members of this congregation, continue to receive this (these) person(s) as Ruling Elder(s), and do you continue your promise to yield him/her/them and all your officers all that honor, encouragement, and obedience in the Lord to which the ordination as an officer entitles him/her/them, according to the Word of God and the Constitution of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church?

When the congregation has responded in the affirmative, the candidates for ordination shall kneel [except that a person previously ordained in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, or another Presbyterian denomination, shall not] and the Ruling Elders may lay hands on the ordinands. A solemn prayer may be offered suitable to the event and the candidates shall thereby be set apart to the office to which elected. Then the presiding person may state:

By the authority of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church and the church Session of this congregation, I declare that ... (here the names of the new Ruling Elders may be read) ... have been ordained to the office of Ruling Elder and have been properly installed in that office, agreeable to the Word of God and the laws of this Church. As such they are entitled to be given support, encouragement, honor, and obedience in the Lord. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. And now as a token of that support, we extend to you the right hand of fellowship.

All members of the Session shall give the new Elders the right hand of fellowship. It is appropriate that a charge be given to the new officers and to the congregation suitable for the occasion. The worship service may then conclude with a hymn of praise, and the benediction. The church Session shall make careful account of the event and inscribe the occasion in its permanent records.