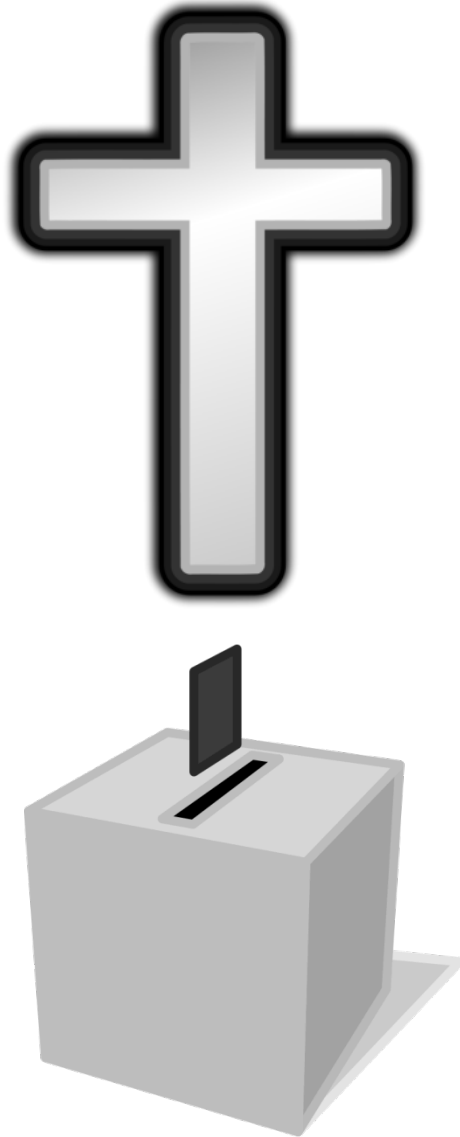


# Electing Ruling Elders

## A Resource for Kirk Sessions

(Including guidelines for Presbytery)



This resource was produced by the Panel on Leadership and approved by the Committee for Training and Resources and Board of Christian Training of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

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## **Introduction**

This resource is intended to help Kirk Sessions think through the process of electing new elders. It starts by engaging with the important question of why new elders should be sought and then explains the process step by step. Guidance is given on choosing between the two methods for electing elders described in the Code of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland. It goes without saying that the Kirk Session will be seeking God’s leading in electing new elders. However, it is important to note that, as Presbyterians, we believe He works in and through these processes so that everything is done in an orderly manner with godly wisdom so that both the steps taken and the end result ultimately glorify Him.

***A shortened ‘quick start guide’ to this resource is available for easy reference by elders in discussions in Kirk Session.***

## **Why elect new elders?**

Before initiating the process of electing new elders, it is useful for the Kirk Session to reflect on why new elders should be sought. This section gives some guidance on making this crucial first decision. Kirk Sessions come to good decisions through praying for the work of the Holy Spirit in their discussions and by talking through the issues. The following are some pointers on having a conversation in order to come to a well-considered decision that is biblically based and practically applied.

### **Question: what has raised this issue of seeking new elders?**

*The purpose of this question is to find out why new elders are being sought and to determine if this is a good reason to proceed.*

Some possible answers might be:

- The Kirk Session has diminished in size due to retirements of elders or elders resigning because they have moved away or for some other reason.
- We have gaps in elders' districts that are too much for the existing elders to cover.
- We have identified some other responsibilities for elders that the existing elders are not able to fulfil.
- We haven't had an election for years and we want to bring on some new people to bring fresh ideas and better representation from the congregation.

It is possible in answering this question that although the initial concern that prompted the question was one thing, for example, a shortage of elders for districts, the discussion helpfully highlights another reason like the need for fresh people. A useful additional question to ask is: "what other reasons might we have for electing elders?"

### **Question: is this a good reason to elect new elders?**

*Having answered the previous question, it is wise to examine the answer rather than accept it on face value. This should lead to a discussion on the role of a Ruling Elder that will benefit the Kirk Session whether or not the decision is made to proceed to seeking new elders.*

To help answer this question it is helpful to also ask: "What is the essential role of the elder and how many do we need to do that role effectively?" A brief answer to this is that the essential role of a Ruling Elder is to rule or, in other words, to provide spiritual leadership of the congregation together with the Teaching Elder as part of the Kirk Session. The Bible does not give a definite answer on how many elders should lead the congregation but it seems obvious that it must be at least three (two Ruling Elders and one Teaching Elder is the minimum required by the Code 26 (1)). In medium to large congregations, three would be too few. More often it is the case that there are too many Ruling Elders for the leadership team to function effectively through each member making a contribution. Some congregations find that a smaller number can make a very effective leadership team. There are ways to address the problem of having too many elders (e.g. creating sub-committees or allowing a decrease over time) but electing new elders is obviously not one of them.

**Question: if the reason for electing elders was not valid, how can we address the original problem in another way?**

*There is a concern that led to the issue being raised. Therefore, the conversation should not stop here and should address the original problem.*

Some common issues and possible ways to address them are:

**We have a number of gaps in our elders' districts**

Electing elders to fill gaps in elders' districts is probably the most common reason why Kirk Sessions become very large and unwieldy in larger congregations. While some pastoral responsibilities *may* be assigned to particular elders (Code 30(3)) the Code does not require that *all* the pastoral responsibilities be taken on by elders only. Rather it is clear that leadership in the oversight and government of the congregation is the *essential* duty of elders (Code 30(1)). This means that the driving factor for electing elders should not be to cover districts. The Kirk Session is responsible to provide the leadership to organise effective pastoral care but not necessarily to do it all themselves.

The General Assembly has endorsed different models of pastoral care to allow effective care to take place without having to rigidly follow the elder's district model (the district model may still work well in smaller congregations). There will be people in the congregation who are gifted in pastoral care who would not be called to the eldership but who could perform this task. In addition, care and support can and should take place through small groups.

Elders should have contact with the congregation perhaps as pastoral visitors or small group leaders but this is secondary to their essential leadership role as part of Kirk Session.

**We need some fresh ideas and/or better representation of the congregation**

If the Kirk Session is small and an election of elders has not been held for a number of years this could be a good reason for seeking an election of elders. Care would need to be taken that this is not the driving force behind seeking new elders over and above godly character, gifting, etc. However, if the Kirk Session is large already there are other ways to address this issue. Here are some examples (no doubt more could be added):

- Working groups can be formed to address specific areas of congregational life comprising of elders and non-elders.
- Assigning specific elders the task of engaging with specific groups of people or organisations within the congregation in order to provide better communication.
- Seeking ideas from the congregation on areas such as pastoral care or discipleship by means of a survey or suggestion box.

**We have identified some other responsibilities that existing elders are not able to fulfil**

It may be the case that elders feel overstretched. They are often some of the most dedicated volunteers in the congregation. However, this problem generally arises when elders look within the Kirk Session for people to fulfil responsible leadership tasks rather than outside. There is no reason why other godly and gifted leaders cannot be appointed for certain tasks as long as they are overseen by the Kirk Session. For example, if the congregation has home groups, the leaders do not necessarily have to be elders but they should be appointed by and report to the Kirk Session. Sometimes it is also the case that the elders need to ask themselves what they need to give up in order to fulfil their role as elder better as well as giving others opportunities to serve.

## Steps in electing new elders

Having decided that it would be a wise decision to seek the election of new elders, the following steps are necessary. This section describes the process from start to finish.

### Before starting!

Note that early in the process a decision needs to be taken on which of two different methods as described by the Code is to be used. The Kirk Session must also decide from three options how the voters' list will be communicated to the congregation. Details on these two factors are included in the steps but decisions regarding these steps are better taken at an early stage. Guidance is given below to facilitate an informed discussion regarding these decisions.

The Code **must** be followed – any guidance offered is in addition to the process set down by the Code which should be referred to at every stage.

<b>Step 1: The Kirk Session decide to seek the election of new elders (Code 177 (1))</b>	
The Kirk Session, following discussion (see guidance above), decides to seek the election of new elders and decides how many are required. It is useful to have a summary of the reasons why the Kirk Session believes new elders are necessary.	
Note that the Code also states that any member of the congregation can request the Kirk Session to consider the election of elders.	
<b>Step 2: The decision of the Kirk Session is reported to Presbytery for authorisation to proceed (Code 177 (2))</b>	
Presbytery (being the higher court of the church and the body that ordains elders and to which they are accountable) must give the authorisation for the election of elders and for the number requested. Presbytery, on agreeing to the election, will appoint a commission to perform its duties relating to the election of elders in line with General Assembly guidelines (see Appendix 2).	
<b>Step 3: Deciding which method by which the selection of elders shall take place</b>	
The Code give two methods for selection of people proposed to be called to the office of Ruling Elder (Code 178 (1) and (2)). The Kirk Session must decide which method to use. The process for each method is described in more detail later but in summary they are:	
<b>Method One</b>	<b>Method Two</b>
Members of the congregation put forward names by means of a vote. The Kirk Session form a list of those who received the most votes up to the number of new elders being sought. Each person on the list must have received a minimum of a third of the votes cast. The Kirk Session must approve each person on the list (and therefore can choose not to approve a person on the list).	Members of the congregation are asked to propose names to the Kirk Session. This is not a vote and therefore the number of proposals for each name is irrelevant. Each name proposed is considered individually by the Kirk Session.
<i>Note that in both methods, elders may also be involved in the process of putting forward names because they are members of the congregation as well as being elders. The names approved by the Kirk Session are put to the congregation first to see if there are any objections and then for a vote. Therefore each method involves <b>both</b> Kirk Session <b>and</b> the congregation.</i>	

## Deciding between method one and method two

Having two methods allows each Kirk Session to decide which process will best enable the names of people gifted and called to the eldership to be put on a list to present to the congregation. This will depend on a number of factors. To help this discussion the following 'pros' and 'cons' of the methods are suggested (there may be others in addition to these):

<b>Method One: Congregational vote with Kirk Session approval</b>	
<b>Pros</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows the Kirk Session to assess the standing or reputation of individuals in the eyes of the congregation (remembering that the vote follows preaching on how to identify godly and gifted candidates for the eldership).</li> <li>• Makes the process of deciding who should go on the list simpler and easier because the Kirk Session only decides who is ruled out as unsuitable when giving approval to names rather than who is best.</li> <li>• Can be (or be perceived to be) a fairer system if the Kirk Session are not seen to be impartial. For example, this could be because members of Kirk Session are likely to have close links with people they might propose under method two.</li> </ul>
<b>Cons</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does not provide the Kirk Session with an opportunity to consider the gifting, character and suitability of each person voted for in order to discern the best people for the eldership.</li> <li>• In a congregation where many members are less spiritually mature (perhaps because of nominalism or recent conversion), the weight of the decision making is with them rather than with the more spiritually mature eldership.</li> <li>• In a larger congregation people often do not know each other well enough to know who is gifted outside their own circle making the required one third of votes more difficult to attain.</li> </ul>

<b>Method Two: Selection by Kirk Session from names proposed by congregation</b>	
<b>Pros</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allows the Kirk Session to seriously consider each person proposed and discern who would be best for the eldership. In method one the congregation will do this on an individual basis based on their understanding normally gained through preaching they have heard on the eldership. However, the spiritual maturity of the elders, their knowledge of the role and the helpfulness of group discussion should allow the Kirk Session to do this to a much greater extent.</li> <li>• In a larger congregation (as noted above) it can be more difficult for gifted individuals to attain the required one third of votes cast if people do not know each other well enough.</li> </ul>
<b>Cons</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In a larger congregation, the eldership may not know all individuals very well and therefore may not be so well placed to discuss the merits of everyone proposed.</li> <li>• This method is open to the perception or indeed the possibility of unfairness especially if elders are seen to be choosing those they are related to or with whom they have some other affinity. This is only a disadvantage if this would be a serious temptation for elders (one way to address it is for elders to declare in Kirk Session when they might have a personal interest). Sometimes it can work the other way when an elder is actually less inclined to consider someone for fear of being seen as unfair.</li> </ul>

Aside from these 'pros' and 'cons' there are some factors that may come to mind but are not valid reasons for choosing one method or the other. Some possibilities are:

- Choosing method two because method one might not produce enough names to fill the number of elders required (because of the rule requiring each person to have received at least a third of the votes). This seems to show a lack of faith in God's provision and it may be that a smaller number than originally envisaged is His will.
- Choosing method one because of an unwillingness by the Kirk Session to discuss the merits of individuals for the eldership. This might be for fear of a breach in confidentiality or each elder being too self-conscious of their personal unworthiness. It also may be because there is a fear of saying no to someone who has connections to elders already on Kirk Session. Some responses to this less than adequate reasoning are:
  - If confidentiality is a problem this highlights a much greater issue than choosing between two methods both of which rely on confidentiality because method one requires that Kirk Session do not approve names they deem unsuitable. Any elder who is not able to keep such discussions in confidence should resign (this is a measure of how seriously this should be taken).
  - Being held back by a feeling of personal unworthiness reveals a lack of responsible leadership and a lack of recognition of the grace of God. No elder is perfect but every elder is expected as part of Kirk Session to make tough leadership decisions. The Bible clearly gives the criteria for the eldership (1 Tim.3:2-7; Titus 1:6-11) and the elders should faithfully apply these. This issue arises in both methods but to a greater extent in method two. However, it is worrying if method one is chosen for this reason because it means Kirk Session is unlikely to turn down unsuitable people.
  - Fear of saying no to someone exposes a serious weakness in the leadership of Kirk Session. Leadership requires the courage to tackle unfairness and the humility to consider everyone impartially without favouritism. It is better to address this issue rather than choosing method one over method two. Sweeping this problem under the carpet will not stop it raising its ugly head again.

This resource gives some guidance for a process in which to use both methods in an effective and fair way. Whichever method is chosen it must be for the right reasons so that God is honoured by the integrity of the Kirk Session.

**In summary**, method one could be a good choice for a spiritually mature congregation where people are generally well known to each other. Method two could be a good choice where elders are in a good position to consider the merits of each person proposed. It comes down to whether it is wiser to let the weight of the decision making be with the congregation or with the Kirk Session although in both methods neither are excluded from this process.

#### **Step 4: Deciding how the voters' list will be made available to the congregation (Code 176 (2a))**

The Code gives three options for making the voters' list available. One of these must be chosen before the next step which involves informing the congregation which way the list will be made available to them. The options are:

1. **Read the list** to the congregation on two successive Sundays.
2. **Print and circulate the list** to each member of the congregation named on the list.
3. **Exhibit the list** on two successive Sundays in an obvious and accessible place in the church building so that everyone has the opportunity to see it.

It may be better to go with option three because it will be hard for people to remember the names under option one unless the number of members on the list is very small, and because a revised list may have to be sent out under option two if there are any changes and this may lead to confusion.

#### **Step 5: Communicating to the congregation the requirements of the eldership and explaining the process (Code 177 (3a and 3b)).**

This step is in two parts – the first part should be done by the Minister and the second can be done by the Minister or by another elder (normally the Clerk of Session).

##### **Part One: Communicating the duties and qualifications of the eldership**

As part of this the Minister **must** read Code 30 and 31 (required in Code 177 (3a)).

Suitable texts to preach on include 1 Tim.3:2-7; Titus 1:6-11, 1 Peter 3:5:1-4. Other biblical texts on leadership such as Matthew 20:20-28 are also possibilities. It is suggested that the eldership should be preached on at least twice.

It would also be useful to distribute the leaflet on choosing new elders available free from Assembly Buildings reception or to download it from the Presbyterian Church in Ireland website – [www.presbyterianireland.org](http://www.presbyterianireland.org) – (the text can be copied and pasted into congregational notices).

##### **Part Two: Explaining the process**

The qualifications of voting members of the congregation (Code 175), the method by which the voters' list will be made available (see step 4 above) and the method to be followed in electing elders (see step 3 above) must be explained to the congregation (this can be done verbally or printed in notices distributed to each person present on the two Sundays).

#### **Step 6: Preparing and making available the list of voters (Code 175 and 176)**

Note that the process for making available this list and allowing for any objections must take place before the election of elders (Code 176 (2e)). The time frame for this is two Sundays to communicate the list (if using option 1 or 3 described in step 4) and then allowing a period of time for possible objections (within seven days) and another period for possible appeals to Presbytery (within seven days). This and other timings are illustrated in the next section of this resource which illustrates typical timescales for electing elders.

Details of how to draw up the list and handle any objections are described in Code 175 and 176 (2a to e).

Note that while someone nominated for the eldership can decline (see step 8), it is not possible for their name to be taken off the voters' list *before* votes or proposals are cast.



## Step 7: Method One (Code 178 (1a and b))

The Code says:

(a) On two successive Sundays the congregation shall be informed of the number of new ruling elders being sought and voting members invited to look out among themselves qualified persons suitable for the office, and to give to the Kirk Session on the following Sunday signed lists of the person or persons they propose, not exceeding the number required. The Session may, as they see fit, provide for this by the circulation of poll lists to be marked with the names proposed, signed and returned.

(b) The Session shall examine the lists received; and the names which occur most frequently if the Session approves and if those so proposed shall consent, shall form a list up to the number of ruling elders required. Should any decline to act their places may be filled by those who come nearest in the proposals recorded, up to the said number. No name shall be listed which has not received a minimum of one-third of the votes cast.

Note that this is not an election in the same sense as a political election because:

1. Kirk Session must approve the names and therefore can decide to remove one or more names from the list if those people are deemed unsuitable.
2. Those voted for do not campaign to be elected like politicians and therefore must be asked if they consent to their name remaining on the list (**this means it is advisable to approve a number of names beyond the initial list**).
3. The 'one third' rule must be strictly adhered to. This prevents people getting through on a very small number of votes rather than broader congregational support.

### Guidance on when not to approve someone voted for by the congregation

When might Kirk Session not approve a name on the list? It is important to note that under this method, Kirk Session **must not** simply remove names to get the people they think most suitable – that is method two. To do this would be a betrayal of the congregation's expectations in using method one. Kirk Session **could** deem someone unsuitable for the eldership for the following reasons (based on the criteria in Code 180 (1)):

- **An inadequate knowledge of biblical truth** – a degree in theology is not required but, for example, a recent convert from an unchurched background might not meet the level of biblical knowledge required (and is ruled out on other grounds by 1 Timothy 3:6).
- **No personal faith** – the person will have made a confession of faith to become a communicant member but it may have become clear this is not real for them (perhaps because they did not understand what faith in Jesus means or it was the congregational culture at the time to become a communicant at a certain age, without much reflection or examination). If someone is turned down on this basis, it is the responsibility of the Kirk Session to handle this situation pastorally.
- **A lack of godly character** – this is certainly not an expectation to be perfect but a serious flaw in character, especially one highlighted in 1 Tim.3:2-7 or Titus 1:6-11, would rule someone out for the eldership.
- **A lack of sense of responsibilities and duties of the office** – this might be difficult to ascertain without talking to the person. A way to assess this is to ask how they have handled responsibility and duties in another area of service in the congregation and note if there has been a serious lacking without any sign of improvement.
- **A lack of gifting** – this especially applies to gifting in leadership as part of a team. In assessing this, the Kirk Session needs to take care not to turn down people simply because they are different because diversity brings strength to a team. The question is: would they fall into either extreme of opposing a team approach or being too passive?

- **A lack of availability** – again this might be better ascertained by talking to the person. An obvious sign of a lack of availability is infrequent attendance at Sunday worship.

### Step 7: Method Two (Code 178 (2a and b))

The Code says:

(a) On two successive Sundays the congregation shall be informed that an election of ruling elders is to take place and voting members invited to propose, in writing, for the consideration of the Session, any member or members qualified for the office.

(b) The Session, having considered the proposals received and having obtained the consent of those approved, shall list the names of those to be presented to the congregation.

This is not a vote and the proposed names should never be considered by the number of proposals. Apart from the fact that in principle it would be wrong to do this having chosen method two and not method one, the expectation of the congregation is that it is not a vote (otherwise members would have proposed people again who they knew someone else was proposing already).

For this method a set of criteria to choose the best potential elders is necessary – always surrounded in prayer seeking God’s guidance and discernment. Possible approaches are:

- First use the criteria suggested for method one to **rule out any clearly unsuitable people**.
- Consider ruling out anyone who has not been a communicant member of the congregation for more than three years.
- Assess **gifting** in leadership as part of a team based on active service in another area of congregational life (or in service in a Christian organisation). Note the following:
  - Being on the congregational committee is not in itself evidence of gifting but it may have revealed that the person works well in a team.
  - Leading a Bible study or leading youth or children or some other leadership role can highlight gifting if combined with the ability to work well with others.
  - Consider how proactive the person has been in taking the initiative, suggesting ideas, organising other people to do things, etc.
  - Ask if they have evident gifts in wisdom or encouragement that would add to the team leadership of the Kirk Session.
- Assess **knowledge of biblical truth**, for example by asking:
  - Have they acquired sound biblical knowledge beyond listening to the Sunday sermon by attending a Bible study, further study or through personal reading?
  - Have they given evidence of their knowledge, for example, by contributing well in Bible studies or by giving a biblical talk? Is there evidence that their biblical knowledge has led to transformation in their life?
- Assess their **shepherd’s heart** by asking:
  - Have they shown real concern for people? For example, when they are in conversation do they talk about themselves or show an interest in the other person? Are they involved in caring for others?
  - Do they have a heart for the lost? How is this evident?
  - In what ways have they shown hospitality?
- Assess the depth of their **godly character**:
  - If they are a parent, do they manage their family well? Are they interested only in their own immediate family or are they inclusive of others? If they do not have children, how do they relate to and involve others?
  - How have they coped with challenging situations?

- Have they been the cause of conflict? Are they a negative person? Do they have unrealistic expectations of others? Or do they make a positive contribution to helping people get along together?

*Appendix one provides a table which could be used or adapted for the purpose of discerning the best candidates for the eldership.*

If there are a large number of people to consider, it may be useful to have a scoring system to help discern who would be best but do not be too tightly bound by it – simply use it as a tool to highlight the more obvious choices. This is not a job interview where strict criteria apply; this is a process of discernment guided by the Holy Spirit with the wisdom and insight He provides.

In undergoing this process it is important that only valid criteria are used and members of Kirk Session are honest with themselves and each other about any prejudice or bias, for example, preferring people who are the same in age, outlook (within the boundaries of Presbyterian doctrine and practice) or who are family members or others with whom they have a close affinity.

**As with method one, it is wise to have back-up candidates in case anyone who is asked first declines to go forward.**

#### **Step 8: Approaching someone on the list to ask their consent**

Often it is the Minister who has this task (it could also be the Clerk of Session). The following guidelines are suggested for whoever does this:

- Assure them that the conversation is confidential and that only the Kirk Session are aware of it.
- Explain to them the responsibilities and duties of the eldership so that they can consider whether they are available to fulfil these.
- Be prepared to assure the person that the role is dependent on the grace of God and the empowering of the Holy Spirit if they express any feelings of inadequacy (such humility is generally a good sign!). Assure them that there will be a period of training.
- Briefly explain the requirements of subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith but assure them that there will be an opportunity to read this and receive training on it before committing to subscription.
- Tell them what happens next.

If a person declines it will be necessary to approach a backup candidate. People who have been voted for (within the 'one third' rule) under method one or proposed under method two should not be approached unless the Kirk Session has first approved them.

#### **Step 9: Presenting the list of elders elect to the congregation (Code 179 (1 and 2))**

The list of elders elect is read to the congregation on two successive Sundays allowing for voting members to lodge any objections in writing within seven days of the second announcement.

#### **Step 10: Considering objections (Code 179 (3))**

The Kirk Session should consider any objections and decide whether or not to sustain them. A useful way to evaluate objections is to see if they fall into any of the categories that would render a person unsuitable as listed above. It may be necessary to further investigate the validity or otherwise of the objection. This step should be welcomed as a check on the suitability of anyone put forward because there may be things known to members of the

congregation that are unknown to the Kirk Session.

**Step 10: Congregation meeting (Code 179 (3 and 4))**

The meeting must be called from the pulpit at a public service of the congregation (Code 45 (1)) and the purpose of the meeting (to elect elders) must be specified (Code 45 (2)).

The names of those selected are presented individually to the meeting (not as a block). A poll of those present shall be taken and if two-thirds vote in favour, the person shall be declared elected.

**Step 11: Names reported to Presbytery (Code 180 (1))**

Code 180 (1) states:

*The name of every ruling elder elect shall be reported to the appointed Presbytery commission, who, in line with General Assembly guidelines, shall confer with the elder elect respecting their acquaintance with divine truth, their personal faith and character, their sense of the responsibilities and duties of the office and their gifting and availability for the exercise of that office.*

For further guidance for the Presbytery commission see Appendix Two. Note that the guidelines recommend that the vows and process are explained to the elders elect **before** the training (together with the advice that they can withdraw at any time) and that the questions regarding the requirements of Code 180 (1) are asked **after** the training when the elders elect will be more aware of the role and requirements for the eldership.

**Step 12: Training for elders elect (Code 180 (2))**

This training must comprise six sessions and cover the Westminster Confession of Faith and the life and duties of the elder.

The Presbytery guidelines recommended by the General Assembly (see Appendix 2) recommend the training takes place over six weeks and that the Board of Christian Training resource, 'Prepared to Lead' is used. *Prepared to Lead* covers leadership, pastoral care and the Westminster Confession of Faith. It is suggested that if the existing elders have not had any training for a significant period of time they should be strongly encouraged to attend all or part of the training programme.

**Step 13: Ordination of elders (Code 180 (3) and 204 to 206)**

Prior to ordination, Presbytery will consult with the elders elect as per the guidelines in Appendix 2. The Code 204 to 206 gives details of what must happen in the service of ordination.

**Step 14: Ongoing training and development (Code 30 (4) and 73 (b))**

Ordination must be seen as a beginning and the training prior to ordination as basic and introductory. The Code 30 (4) and 73 (b) makes it clear that ongoing equipping of elders is the responsibility of both Kirk Session and Presbytery.

## Typical timescales for election of elders

Note that not every step in the process is described below but only those which involve a significant time period.

<b>1. Kirk Session decides new elders are required</b>
<i>One to four weeks</i> (or longer if Presbytery are not meeting within a month)
<b>2. Presbytery approves request</b>
<b>3. Kirk Session draws up voters' list</b>
<i>One or two weeks</i>
<b>4. Voters' list made available to congregation and time for objections allowed</b>
<i>Four to six weeks</i>
<b>5. Congregation give names to Kirk Session</b>
<i>Two or three weeks</i> (allowing time for names to be received, the Kirk Session meeting and asking people on the list if they consent)
<b>6. Presenting list of elders elect to the congregation</b>
<i>Three weeks minimum</i> (as required by Code 179 (3))
<b>7. Congregational meeting to elect elders</b>
<b>8. Names presented to Presbytery</b>
<b>9. Training of elders elect</b>
<i>Three to six weeks</i> (six weeks is recommended)
<b>10. Ordination of new elders</b>

Based on the above the shortest period in which new elders could be elected and ordained is four months but this is unlikely in practice and it is important not to rush the process. This timescale should also help in planning the process so that it does not take too long.



## **Appendix 2: Presbytery guidelines for approving elders elect**

**(Approved by the General Assembly in 2011)**

1. Whenever a Kirk Session requests authorisation from Presbytery to elect new elders, the Commission should be appointed at this stage to discharge the duties of the Presbytery in this matter. This is in accordance with the Code 177(2). The Commission will normally comprise the Moderator, Clerk, two other ministers plus corresponding elders but will not include the Minister and representative elder of the congregation holding the election.
2. The Clerk of Presbytery will consult with the Minister to ensure that the procedure for holding an election is understood. This will help the Minister fulfil the Code 177(3).
3. Following the election, representatives of the Commission will meet with the Minister first and then the elders elect to inquire from the Minister what training will be given and to explain to the elders elect the vows they will be asked to make at the ordination service and the procedure that will be followed. This is in part fulfilment of the Code 180(1) and it serves to remind the elders- elect that Presbytery is to be involved in their preparation for ordination. The Commission will also draw to their attention that any elder elect may withdraw at any stage if he or she no longer believes the eldership is right for them. (See NOTES below)
4. The training will be held to fulfil the Code 180(2). It is recommended that the 'Prepared to Lead' course be used and it is strongly recommended that the six sessions should be spread over at least six weeks.
5. Following the training and at least one month before the ordination service, the Commission will meet with the Minister first and then the elders elect to confer with them in accordance with the Code 180(1).
  - (a) The questions for the meeting with the Minister will be as follows:
    - (i) Have the minimum six lessons required in the Code been fulfilled?
    - (ii) What system of instruction has been followed for the Confession of Faith and for the duties and responsibilities of the eldership?
    - (iii) Have any problems arisen in regard to matters either of doctrine or practice in respect of which the Commission might be of help?
    - (iv) Have the elders elect considered the prescribed questions to be put to them at their ordination?
  - (b) Having allowed the elders elect to introduce themselves, the questions for the meeting with each elder elect will be as follows:
    - (i) Having been elected by the congregation and having completed your training, can you please tell us what you are most looking forward to and what gives you the greatest concern in entering this office?
    - (ii) Since we affirm that the Word of God as set forth in the Scriptures is the only infallible rule of faith and practice, can you please tell us briefly what place the Scriptures have in your own life? (Prescribed Question II)

- (iii) Are you satisfied that you are sufficiently acquainted with the substance of the Confession of Faith as to be able to subscribe to it as the confession of your faith? (Prescribed Question III+IV)
- (iv) Is there any matter of doctrine or practice arising from your reading of the Confession of Faith on which you feel you would need or like further guidance or help? (Prescribed Question III+IV)
- (v) The duty of ruling elders is to work together with the Minister in the spiritual oversight and government of the congregation (Code Par 30). How will you seek to discharge this duty?
- (vi) By their calling, ruling elders share with the Minister the responsibility for practical witness both in the congregation and in the wider world (Code Par 30). How do you hope to fulfil this responsibility?
- (vii) The Kirk Session is responsible for admission to both sacraments. What challenges do you think this raises for you and have you any concerns about your role in this aspect of the Session's work? (Code Par 39(2))
- (viii) Are you familiar with the prescribed questions which will be put to you at your ordination and are you ready to answer them? The Commission, being satisfied on these matters, will arrange for the ordination service to be held (Code Par 180(3)).

**NOTES:** With reference to the meeting with the elders elect after they are elected and before their training begins (referred to in point 3 above).

(a) Why hold a meeting like this?

(i) To fulfil requirements of the Code 177(2). The decision of the Session shall be reported to the Presbytery for authorisation to proceed with the election and for the appointment of a commission to discharge the duties of the Presbytery in the matter. Code 180(1) – The name of every ruling elder elect shall be reported to the appointed Presbytery commission, who, in line with General Assembly guidelines, shall confer with the elder elect respecting their acquaintance with divine truth, their personal faith and character, their sense of the responsibilities and duties of the office and their gifting and availability for the exercise of that office. Code 180(3) The Presbytery commission, being satisfied on these matters, shall report thereon to Presbytery or shall themselves proceed to ordain those approved, if this lie within the terms of their appointment.

(ii) To highlight the relationship between congregation and Presbytery Code 69(1). The Presbytery is the body primarily responsible for corporate oversight of the congregations and causes assigned to it by the General Assembly, and of the ministers and elders connected with it, and the advancement of Christ's Kingdom generally within its bounds.

(iii) Presbytery's desire to do things better

(b) What could be covered on this evening? The paragraph above (in point 3) refers to meeting with the Minister first of all to inquire what training will be given – its contents, who is delivering it, etc. At the subsequent meeting with the elders elect, three areas should be covered:



(i) The vows:

*Firstly, on your personal sense of calling: So far as you know your own heart, are zeal for the glory of God, love to the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and desire for the salvation of souls and the upbuilding of the Church, your chief motives in entering upon the office of ruling elder to which you have been called?* Comment: This is concerned with our motives in becoming an elder in the Church. In this question we're asking the new elders: Why do you want to be an elder? Some people want to become leaders of an organisation because they want people to look up to them and to speak well of them. They're concerned about their own name and their own glory. But when we enter into the office of the eldership we shouldn't be seeking our own glory, but the glory of God; elders are people who love the name of the Lord Jesus and not their own name; and they're people who love the Church and want to see it built up.

*Secondly, three questions on the Rule of Faith and Standards of the Church: Do you believe the Word of God as set forth in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the only infallible rule of faith and practice?* Comment: This is about ensuring the elders believe that the Bible is God's word so that they will want to uphold it and submit to it.

*Do you accept the Westminster Confession of Faith, as described in the Statement from the Code, read by the Clerk, to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God; as such do you acknowledge it as the confession of your faith; and do you accept the Catechisms compiled by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster and received as the Catechisms of this Church? Are you resolved, through God's grace, firmly and constantly to adhere to the fundamental doctrines of the faith set forth in the said Confession and Catechisms so long as you remain an elder of this Church?* Comment: There are two things that will ruin the Church. One is when the leaders of the Church don't believe the Bible. The other is where the leaders of the Church are divided over what the Bible teaches. So these two questions are about ensuring that our elders agree with one another over what the Bible teaches. Different denominations will disagree and, in a sense, that's fine and understandable: that's what makes us different. But when the leaders of one particular church begin to disagree over what they should believe and teach, then the church will be ruined. And so every elder is asked: Before you become an elder, do you agree with what this Church believes the Bible teaches? Those things are summarised by the WCF and Catechisms.

*Finally, two questions on the discharge of your duties as a ruling elder in this Church. Do you believe the Presbyterian form of Church government to be founded on and agreeable to the Word of God; and do you promise to adhere to and to support it, and to yield submission in the Lord to the courts of this Church?* Comment: The courts of the Church are the Kirk Session, the Presbytery and the General Assembly. The Assembly has oversight over every Presbytery and a Presbytery has oversight over every congregation within its bounds. So, if there's a dispute in this congregation, the Presbytery has the right to intervene in order to sort it out. This question therefore ensures that new elders understand and accept that we do not

exist on our own. We cannot do whatever we please. We are responsible to the wider Church and must answer to the wider Church for what we do.

*Do you pledge yourself as a member of Kirk Session to work together with the Minister in the oversight and government of this congregation, for the upbuilding of God's people in spiritual fruitfulness and holy concord, and for the extension of Christ's Kingdom?* Comment: It's interesting that one of the qualifications Paul gives for elders in 1 Timothy is that they should not be quarrelsome. When the Session meets, we don't want elders who are arguing constantly and fighting with one another and who are never willing to accept that someone else might be right. So, we need elders who are the kind of people who are able to work together with others to build up the Church and to extend Christ's Kingdom.

(ii) The Procedures. Go over the procedure with the elders and the questions they'll be asked at the conferral before ordination.

(iii) Important Reminder. Draw to their attention that any elder elect may withdraw at any stage if he or she no longer believes the eldership is right for them.