# Electing Ruling Elders
'Quickstart' resource for Kirk Sessions
(A full version is also available – this resource is provided for easy reference)

As Presbyterians, we seek God in prayer in this important process of electing new elders and also recognise that He will work in and through these processes so that everything is done in an orderly manner with godly wisdom so that the end result will glorify him.
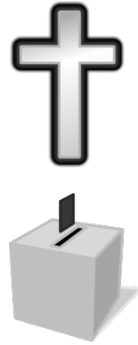
Why Elect New Elders?

Some questions that it would be useful to discuss:

1. What has raised this issue of seeking new elders?
2. Is this a good reason to elect new elders? For example, we might also ask: how many elders do we need for functional leadership team?
3. If it is not necessarily a good reason, how can we address the original issue? For example, are there other ways to deal with gaps in elders' districts, fulfil specific leadership responsibilities or obtain fresh input and ideas from the congregation?

Steps in electing new elders

If the decision is that it would be wise to elect new elders, the following steps are necessary (two of the steps include options and these should be chosen at an early stage). The Code **must** be followed and relevant references are given – any guidance offered here is in addition to the process set down by the Code.

Step 1: The Kirk Session decide to seek the election of new elders (Code 177 (1))
The Kirk Session decides to seek the election of elders and decides how many are required.

Step 2: The decision of the Kirk Session is reported to Presbytery for authorisation to proceed (Code 177 (2))
Presbytery authorise the election of elders and the number requested.

Step 3: Deciding which method by which the selection of elders shall take place	
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.	
Method One	**Method Two**
Members of the congregation put forward names by means of a vote (a minimum of a third of the votes cast is necessary for each name to go forward). The Kirk Session must approve each person on the list.	Members of the congregation are asked to propose names to the Kirk Session. This is not a vote and the number of proposals for each name is irrelevant. Each person proposed is considered by the Kirk Session.
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.	
Step 4: Deciding how the voters' list is made available to the congregation (Code 176 (2a))	
The Code gives three options for making the voters' list available. 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 place in the church building.	

Step 5: Communicating to the congregation the requirements of the eldership and explaining the process (Code 177 (3a and 3b)).
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 Timothy 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. There is a leaflet available from Assembly Buildings or the PCI website on choosing new elders. **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 (verbally or in printed notices distributed to each person present on the two Sundays).
Step 6: Preparing and making available the list of voters (Code 175 and 176)
The process of making available this list and allowing for any objections must take place before the election of elders (Code 176 (2e)).
Step 7: Method One (Code 178 (1a and b))
This is not an election in the same sense as a political election because: 1. Kirk Session must approve the names and can decide to remove one or more names from the list if those people are deemed unsuitable. 2. Those voted for must be asked if they consent to their name remaining on the list. 3. The 'one third' rule must be strictly adhered to. **Guidance on when not to approve someone voted for by the congregation** Kirk Session must not simply remove names to get the people they think most suitable – that is method two. 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 (perhaps a recent convert – see 1 Tim. 3:6). • No personal faith • A lack of godly character – see 1 Tim.3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-11. • A lack of sense of responsibilities and duties of the office. • A lack of gifting (especially in leading as part of a team). • A lack of availability
Step 7: Method Two (Code 178 (2a and b))
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). • Assess knowledge of biblical truth • Assess their shepherd's heart (have they a concern for people and a heart for the lost) • Assess the depth of their godly character: 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 favouritism.
With both methods, it is wise to have back-up candidates in case anyone declines.

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 the conversation is confidential and only the Kirk Session is aware of it. • Explain to them the responsibilities and duties of the eldership. • Be prepared to assure the person that the role is dependent on the grace of God and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. Assure them that there will be a period of training. • Briefly explain the requirements of subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith. • Tell them what happens next.
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. Voting members can lodge 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.
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 is taken and if two-thirds vote in favour, the person shall be declared elected.
Step 11: Names reported to Presbytery (Code 180 (1))
Note that in the full resource there are detailed guidelines for Presbytery.
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 'Prepared to Lead' course is recommended which covers leadership, pastoral care and the Westminster Confession of Faith. If existing elders have not had any training for a significant period of time, is suggested that they should 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 on-going equipping of elders is the responsibility of both Kirk Session and Presbytery.

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