

What Is the Session?

The Session is the group of elders who collectively guide the church on behalf of the membership. As a collective whole, they make important decisions to keep our church healthy, sound, and on mission.

Elders (Greek *presbyteros*, hence our denominational name), are called by the congregation to lead the congregation. Individually, they do not exercise governing power, but together they function as mature Christian shepherds who help the flock through difficulties and encourage their growth.

Elders:

- Are responsible to prayerfully watch over the flock as a shepherd
- Periodically, pray for members who request healing prayer
- Provide spiritual guidance and wisdom to congregants, especially church members who are assigned to them for care
- Pray during or after Sunday worship services (10 to 20 minutes) with individual congregants who are seeking prayer
- Provide oversight of the church's ministry, finances, and operations (especially elders who are also trustees)
- Oversee pastoral leaders and the church's theological integrity to the fullest extent possible
- Conduct periodic membership interviews (about 1 hour per interview)
- Serve as a representative of the church by visibly helping at New at RWS gatherings, certain classes, other large church events, and Presbytery meetings
- On rare occasions, become involved in complex church discipline cases

Commitment

- Attend Session meetings, typically on Monday evenings, with occasional extra meetings
- Are willing and able to meet congregants for spiritual care, usually at church, but sometimes at hospitals or other places
- Collaborate with other elders and deacons to care for those in need
- Periodically join a smaller Session committee, participate in joint Redeemer Network meetings, attend regional Presbytery meetings, or lead an RWS event

"Most churches make the mistake of electing as their officers the competent, the confident, and the successful. What you really need in your leaders are people who have been broken by a knowledge of their own sin and restored by an even greater knowledge of grace." – Dave McCarthy

What Is the Diaconate?

The Diaconate is a ministry of mercy that supports Redeemer congregants who are undergoing hardship such as job loss, relational crisis, and other life challenges. We seek to demonstrate the transforming power of the gospel and healing love of God during times of suffering. Deacons and deaconesses walk alongside congregants through prayer, spiritual guidance, emotional support, and in many cases, practical and financial assistance.

Deacons and Deaconesses:

- Provide practical assistance and care to Redeemer members and regular attenders who are in challenging circumstances by serving on diaconate cases (approximately 2 to 8 hours per case per month), which includes:
 - Working with a Diaconate partner to love and know the person they are serving
 - Collaborating with the Diaconate partner and the person you are serving to craft an appropriate Care Plan and goals. Implementing the Care Plan by meeting and praying with the person you're serving, exhorting him or her, and encouraging personal accountability towards his or her goals
 - Maintaining administrative tasks and communications with the Diaconate staff
- Pray during or after Sunday worship services (10 to 20 minutes) with individual congregants who are seeking prayer
- Conduct periodic membership interviews alongside elders (about 1 hour per interview)
- Serve as a representative of the church by helping at the New at RWS class and at other large church events
- Optional: Serve on the Diaconate Committee, which oversees the Diaconate Mercy Fund and/or lead an event for the church

Commitment

- Attend quarterly diaconate meetings during the ministry year (fall to spring), which include ongoing theological and practical skills training
- Collaborate with other deacons and elders to care for those in need
- Once voted in by the congregation, deacons and deaconesses commit to an initial **three-year term** and have the option to renew their commitment each year thereafter

"In many ways, diaconal ministry (mercy ministry) is one of the primary ways for the world to see a visible example of the heart of God. The faith to be bold in stepping into the lives of the poor and the weak to give 'a cup of cold water,' a boldness to not ignore or dismiss the cries of those whose sufferings are great... and the wisdom of the Spirit in knowing how to help them." – Tim Keller

Nomination and Discernment Process

For elder nominees:

- June: Application & references; schedule initial interview with two elders (or an elder + a pastor)
- Jul - Sep: Self-assessment; topical studies and readings; begin apprenticeship with mentor
- Oct - Dec: Pastoral care and prayer training and practice; mid-point evaluation
- Jan - Mar: Theology and *Book of Church Order* training; PCA and Session leadership training
- Apr - May: Theology exam and final interview; election; ordination

For deek nominees:

- Jun - Sep: Application and references; schedule initial interview with an elder or pastoral staff and deek
 - Nominees may get a head start on their readings over the summer if they choose
- Oct - Dec: Pastoral care and prayer training & practice; self-assessment; mid-point evaluation
- Jan - Mar: Theology and *Book of Church Order* training; diaconate practical skills training
- Apr - May: Theology exam and final interview; election; ordination and installation

Membership Requirements

- **Elders** - By the end of the nomination period, nominees need to have been:
 - a Christian for at least three years *and*
 - a Redeemer West Side member for at least one year.
 - Please note that a minimum of two nominations are required for an elder nominee to enter the discernment process.
- **Deacons and deaconesses** - By the end of the nomination period, nominees need to have been:
 - a Christian for at least three years *and*
 - a Redeemer West Side member for at least one year *OR*
 - a regular RWS attendee for at least 2 years *and*
 - an RWS member for at least 6 months.

Five Categories of Qualifications

The following guidelines, though not the final word, ought to help as you consider whether or not to nominate a particular member to serve in the position of a deacon, deaconess, or elder of the church.

- **Calling:** Calling is both inward and outward. A nominee should desire to serve others and should be recognized by others as possessing the gifts and graces necessary for the task.
- **Character:** Though no leader can expect to be perfect, he or she must be exemplary, modeling in a consistent way the character of Christ. 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1:5-9 offer a useful summary of the character qualifications.
- **Competency:** God calls elders, deacons and deaconesses to serve in distinct and varying ways. A nominee should evidence the inclination and ability to fulfill that particular biblical role.
 - Elder nominees should be able to equip and care for people spiritually and should know their way around the Bible and be able to teach it. They should be comfortable praying with people in need and possess management skills.
 - Deacon and deaconess nominees should demonstrate a practical and caring spirit. They should be willing to serve under the authority of the elders and in such a way as to free the elders to focus on their particular responsibilities.
- **Compatibility:** Nominees need to understand and support the Redeemer vision and values.
- **Comprehension:** Nominees need to understand and accept Redeemer's convictions about theology and church government. This involves a commitment to the Bible's authority, to Presbyterian church government, and to the Westminster Standards.