

# Elder Candidacy

## Process Outline

### Introduction

The office of pastor/elder is a high calling in the New Testament church. At GraceLife Church, we take seriously the requirements for and the expectations of the office and consider anyone desiring the office to approach it with much sober judgment and cautious consideration.

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### Elder Candidates

Applicants to the *Elder Candidacy* process either self-nominate themselves to the elders after sensing a call to pastoral leadership (1 Timothy 1:1), or are approached by the Lead Pastor (elders) who have observed the godly life, pastoral heart, and unique giftedness of the individual—which can indicate a man’s fit within the leadership of the church.

Men accepted into the candidacy process will be announced to the congregation prior to beginning their training. During a man’s candidacy, members of the church will observe his life, character, and ministry, and can raise any questions or concerns they have to the leaders at any time..

The candidacy is a twelve-month discovery and development process where men walk with and work alongside the pastor(s), while being educated and tested concerning their calling and spiritual gifts. Candidates are expected to participate in regularly scheduled meetings with the Lead Pastor, complete assigned readings, write a paper outlining their understanding of key theological issues, and sit for a public oral exam covering their faith, practice, and philosophy of ministry.

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### Elder Nominees

After a candidate successfully completes the twelve-month process, meeting all necessary requirements, and receives the (unanimous) affirmation of the Lead Pastor (elders), he will then be considered an official *elder nominee* who must then be affirmed by the membership of the church.

In holding the office of elder, we would expect our new elder(s) to shepherd the flock at GraceLife Church. They, and their families, would be dedicating their time, energy, and resources to the service of GraceLife Church, which would require a great personal cost.

We’re encouraged by your desire to grow in shepherding and leadership. That said, our hope is that this training and discipleship would happen *within your local church*, under the care of your pastor(s) at GraceLife.

This process is intentionally structured to reflect the time, commitment, and sacrifice required to shepherd well. While we don’t ask you to neglect your families or responsibilities, we do call you to make intentional space for elder training within the life of GraceLife and her pastor(s).

## Summary Qualifications of an Elder

The elder qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 are essential marks *expected* of any man being considered for eldership.

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### THE MAN'S CHARACTER

- A man – elders will be qualified and called men
- Above reproach – demonstrating a consistent godly life
- Able to teach – effective Bible communicator
- Not a new convert – mature Christian
- Temperate – mentally and emotionally stable, not prone to overindulgence
- Self-controlled – disciplined life of sound decision-making
- Not given to drunkenness – without addictions
- Not a lover of money – financially content and upright

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### THE MAN'S FAMILY

- Husband of one wife – a one-woman man, faithful to his spouse
- Has obedient children – an effective father
- Manages family well – provides for, leads, organizes, loves

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### THE MAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS

- Respectable – worth following and imitating
- Hospitable – welcomes strangers, Christian and non-Christian, to point them to Jesus
- Not violent – even-tempered, strives for peace
- Gentle – kind, gracious, loving
- Not contentious – not quarrelsome/divisive
- Good reputation with outsiders – respected by non-Christians

### The Duties of an Elder

The duties of the elders are many according to Scripture, and must be carried out by faithful, competent men who rely fully on the grace of God and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

- Prayer and the study of Scripture (Acts 6:4)
- Oversee/lead the church (1 Timothy 5:17)
- Manage the church (1 Timothy 3:4–5)
- Care for the members of the church (1 Peter 5:2–5)
- Live exemplary lives (Hebrews 13:7)
- Rightly use the authority God has given them (Acts 20:28)
- Preach/teach the Bible correctly (Ephesians 4:11; 1 Timothy 3:2, 5:17)
- Teach sound doctrine and refute false teachings (Titus 1:9)
- Pray for the sick (James 5:13–15)
- Work hard (1 Thessalonians 5:12)
- Lead willingly, eagerly, and gently (1 Peter 5:1–3)
- Discipline unrepentant Christians (Matthew 18:15–17)
- Practice evangelism (2 Timothy 4:5)

The elders will give an account to God for the church (Hebrews 13:17), so it is critical that we not only strive to be faithful to our calling, but do so in the strength God alone can provide (Colossians 1:28, 29).

### The Mission of an Elder

“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.” (Col. 1:28-29)

The mission of an elder is to preach and teach Jesus Christ, and ensure that the church is doing so, in a way that edifies everyone and leads to their spiritual maturity. Such work requires great effort, and requires us to rely on the power God supplies.

Our mission is a necessary component of the mission Jesus gave the church, to “make disciples of all nations.” (Matthew 28:18-20).

## What We Are Looking For

While no man is perfect, but in fact is still corrupt in heart and life, those who will serve as elders in the church are to be men of good character and evident love for God and his people.

Therefore:

- We want men of sound doctrine who have a love of Scripture and biblical insight.
- We want men who understand their calling and spiritual gift(s).
- We want men who are teachable and hungry to learn.
- We want men who can teach well and refute error with courage.
- We want men who can discipline with strength and shepherd with tenderness.
- We want men who love people, both Christian and non-Christian.
- We want men who are already leading others as they follow Christ.
- We want men who are responsible, hard-working, and self-governing.
- We want men whose wives demonstrate maturity and wisdom.
- We want men who are Christ-like heads of their homes.
- We want men who the other elders see as a peer.
- We want men who are both humble and passionate.

### Reflection Paper

This reflection paper is designed to help you evaluate your strengths and areas for growth in light of the biblical qualifications for an elder (1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:5-9). It will guide you in assessing your spiritual life, character, and leadership and help you reflect on your readiness for the role of elder.

#### 1. Conversion and Call:

- Introduce your story of conversion and journey toward eldership and your understanding of the biblical role of an elder. Write a summary of your conversion story and call to pastoral ministry. Please explain not only your “calling” but also how that calling has been affirmed by others.

#### 2. Scriptural Qualifications:

- Summarize and define the biblical qualifications of an elder from **1 Timothy 3:1-7** and **Titus 1:5-9**.

#### 3. Self-Reflection:

- **Strengths:** Reflect on areas where you feel confident in meeting the qualifications (e.g., character, leadership, ability to teach).
- **Areas for Growth:** Identify areas where you need improvement (e.g., self-control, family life, teaching ability).
- **Soul Reflection:** Incorporate their honest evaluation of your strengths and weaknesses.

#### 4. Action Steps:

- List specific actions you will take to grow in your weaknesses and continue developing your strengths (e.g., resources, accountability, how other pastors can encourage you, and other practical steps).
- Include any long-term desires you may have for full-time ministry, missions, or church planting, etc.

#### 5. Conclusion:

- Summarize your reflections and action steps, and affirm your commitment to grow as a servant-leader, as one who feels called by the Lord to be an elder at GraceLife Church, who is striving to meet the biblical qualifications for eldership.

**Tone:** Thoughtful, humble, and prayerful, with Scripture as your foundation.

**Deadline:** TBD

### Group Discussion

#### Mentorship Discussion Reading (Monthly Discussion Based on the Following)

- *The Holy Bible – Scripture Reading reflects reading from Thune*
- *Systematic Theology – Louis Berkhof*
- *Gospel-Centered Eldership – Robert Thune*

#### Month 1 – Mark 10:32-45

Berkhof – Attributes and Works of God (pp. 3-70)

Thune – Introduction and Chapter 1: Servant Leadership

For the Library – The Existence and Attributes of God, Stephen Charnock

#### Month 2 – Acts 20:1-38

Berkhof – The Trinity (pp. 71-172)

Thune - Chapter 2: A Biblical Approach to Church Leadership (Thune)

For the Library – The Trinity: An Introduction, Scott Swain

#### Month 3 – 1 Timothy 3:1-16; Titus 1:1-9

Berkhof – Anthropology: Created/Fallen/Redeemed/Glorified (pp. 175-261)

Thune - Chapter 3: The Primacy of Character

For the Library – Human Nature in Its Fourfold State, Thomas Boston

#### Month 4 – Nehemiah 1-5

Berkhof -Covenant Theology (pp. 262-303)

Thune - Chapter 4: The Leadership Triangle

For the Library – The Mystery of Christ, Sam Renihan

#### Month 5 – Titus 1:7-11; 2 Timothy 4:1-4, Jude 3-4

Berkhof – Christ’s States of Humiliation and Exaltation (pp. 307-360)

Thune – Interlude and Chapter 5: Elders Feed the Church

For the Library – The Person of Christ, Donald Macleod

#### Month 6 – Psalm 78

Berkhof – The Atonement (pp. 362-421)

Thune - Chapter 6: Elders Lead the Church

For the Library – Redemption Accomplished and Applied, John Murray

#### Month 7 – Jeremiah 27-28

Berkhof – Union with Christ/ Calling/Regeneration pp. 425-433,461-496)

Thune - Chapter 7: Elders Protect The Church

For the Library – Communion With God, John Owen

#### Month 8 – 1 Peter 5:1-11

Berkhof – The Work of the Holy Spirit (pp. 434-443; John Gill - A Body of Doctrinal Divinity, Book 1, Chpt 31)

Thune - Chapter 8: Elders Care for the Church

For the Library – The Holy Spirit, Sinclair Ferguson

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Month 9 – Jeremiah 29; Acts 17

**Berkhof** – Conversion/Justification/Sanctification (pp. 497-572)

**Thune** - Chapter 9: Missional Eldership

For the Library – Justification: Understanding The Classic Reformed Doctrine, JV Fesko

Month 10– Acts 20:29-35; 1 Samuel 15:2; 2 Samuel 11-12

**Confession** - New Hampshire Statement Articles 1-7

**Berkhof** – The Church and The Means of Grace (pp. 575-688)

**Thune** - Chapter 10: The Temptation of Leadership

For the Library – A Body of Practical Divinity, Books II and III, John Gill

Green Pastures; Ordinary Means of Grace, J. Ryan Davidson

The Church, Sinclair Ferguson

Month 11– **Confession** - New Hampshire Statement Articles 8-13

**Berkhof** – Eschatology: Death/Intermediate State/Resurrection/Glory (pp. 691-774)

**Thune** - Chapter 10: The Temptation of Leadership (Thune)

For the Library – The Bible and The Future, Anothy Hoekema

Month 12– New Hampshire Statement Articles 14-18

**Berkhof** – Wrap and Catch Up

**Thune** - Chapter 10: The Temptation of Leadership

\* *Berkhof reading may be slightly different, depending on which edition. We will coordinate accordingly to make sure we are all on the same page.*

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## Required Theological Reading

Elder candidates will be required to read:

- *Systematic Theology* by Louis Berkhof\*

In Addition to Berkhof, each candidate will be assessed and assigned appropriate readings to help prepare him for service as an elder. Elder candidates will be required to read 2 of the following:

- *Biblical Eldership* (booklet), by Alexander Strauch
- *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, by James M. Boice
- *The Church*, by Edmund Clowney\*
- *The Shepherd Leader*, by Timothy Witmer\*
- *Spiritual Leadership* by J. Oswald Sanders
- *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, by Donald Whitney
- *Compelling Community*, by Mark Dever and Jamie Dunlop
- *Christ-Centered Preaching* by Bryan Chapell
- *Biblical Preaching* by Haddon Robinson
- *The Sovereignty of God*, by A.W. Pink
- *Others as needed*

\* - If you have not read, prioritize this resource.

## Theological Writing

### ARTICULATION OF GIFT AND CALLING

Each candidate must write out a self-analysis of his gifts and the reason God has called him to be an elder at GraceLife Church, including any long-term desires they may have for full-time ministry, missions, or church planting, etc.

*See the Reflection paper on page 4.*

### THEOLOGY PAPER

**OPTION A.** Each candidate must write a summary of their theological convictions with Scriptural support on many important biblical subjects. Candidates are encouraged to use helpful theological works in the writing of their paper, though the content must all be in the candidate's own words.

#### 1. Bibliology

- Special and general revelation defined and distinguished.
- Inspiration, inerrancy and infallibility defined.
- Illumination and method of interpretation defined.
- Address: Is the canon closed, is revelation ongoing?

#### 2. Theology Proper

- The Trinity defined; persons distinguished.
- Attributes of God.

#### 3. Christology

- Deity and attributes of Christ; His pre-existence.
- Incarnation, humanity, and hypostatic union.
- Earthly ministry – purpose and work.
- Death, resurrection, ascension, and return.

#### 4. Pneumatology

- Deity and “personhood.”
- Old Testament ministry and works.
- His ministry related to Christ, believers, and the world.
- Spiritual gifts today.
- Terms and concepts: Spirit baptism, indwelling, sealing, filling, and fruit.

#### 5. Angelology and Satanology

- Existence, creation and nature of angels.
- Holy angels – their purpose, work and ministry.
- Satan – who he is, his rebellion and fall, his present activity, and judgment.
- Demons – their fall, work, and judgment.
- Demonic oppression and possession – who can be possessed and how.

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### 6. Anthropology and Hamartiology

- Theory of creation – literal, day/age, etc.
- Define “imago dei” (image of God).
- The fall of man – original state, fallen state (sin nature), sin defined, the results of sin (penalty, depravity, inability).
- Transmission of sin – imputation, inheritance of sin.

### 7. Soteriology

- The basis and cause of our salvation.
- How one becomes a Christian – man’s responsibility.
- Regeneration?
- Terms: election, foreknowledge, redemption, reconciliation, propitiation, conviction, glorification, sanctification.

### 8. Ecclesiology

- Origin and definition of the church.
- Church leadership and government.
- Church ordinances.

### 9. Eschatology

- Death and resurrection.
- Intermediate state.
- The return of Jesus Christ.
- The eternal state, new heaven and earth.

**OPTION B.** In order to encourage Biblical Counseling and Care, Elder Candidates who are in the process or desire to complete ACBC certification may submit a copy of their Theological Exam for review.

Please let Parker know ASAP of your plans to pursue this options, so he can provide you with resources, formatting instructions, and help.

## Teaching and Preaching Opportunities

One of the intended benefits and challenges within the cohort is that ample opportunity to preach is given. In time, our goal is to allow for your learning and growth to translate into practice. One aim of this cohort is to challenge and ‘resource’ men to preach the scriptures through Expositional Preaching. We will work hard to find opportunities for you to preach.

In addition to these opportunities, our desire is to assist you in the future as well. We aim to help you pray and discern God’s guidance for your life.

### Teaching Opportunity #1

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Venue: \_\_\_\_\_ Text: \_\_\_\_\_

### Teaching Opportunity #2

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Venue: \_\_\_\_\_ Text: \_\_\_\_\_

### Teaching Opportunity #3

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Venue: \_\_\_\_\_ Text: \_\_\_\_\_

### Teaching Opportunity #4

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Venue: \_\_\_\_\_ Text: \_\_\_\_\_

Each Preaching/Teaching Opportunity will be discussed together. The goal here is not to tear down but to encourage and build one another up. Also, the long-term goal is to form a habit of giving Godly critique and receive Godly critique.

### Final Stages

In this final phase, you are synthetizing and compiling your growth and development and preparing for ordination within the local church. *As a part of this process and by nature of being an example to the flock (1 Pt 5:3), you will be required to submit to a background check, credit check, as well as provide a copy of your giving record to the local church for the last three to five years before you are considered for ordination at GraceLife Church.*

The desire is that God would build you up, train you up and for you to serve for the edification of the local church for the glory of God. What a gift of God to train up pastors from among the congregation, who are affirmed by the church, and serve to faithfully shepherd and lead the local church for the glory of God!

In ordination be prepared to answer questions from doctrine, interpretation, qualifications, calling, as well as personal/familial integrity. Finally, because pastors should model discipleship to the church as Lead Disciple-Makers, you will be specifically asked about your discipleship with others during ordination.

After ordination, in the Lord's timing, you will be presented to the church to affirm your calling as Shepherd/Pastor. Giving the high calling of the office of pastor, those currently within that office within the local church are the best fitted to examine, disciple, and recommend candidates to the church for affirmation. In so doing, the pastor is functioning out of his calling from the Lord to Feed, Lead, Protect the flock (Acts 20:29) in only bringing biblically called and qualified men as pastoral candidates to the church. This again affirms the high calling of the pastoral office and stresses the importance of a candidacy process and time of discernment.

