

Greetings,

With the approval of proposed amendments to the ELC Constitution at the 2023 AGM, your ELC Board continues in our commitment to provide clarifying information as we now transition to implementation.

By way of background, it may be helpful for some to be informed or reminded of the specific article in the ELC Constitution which framed the basis for the proposed amendments to article IV.

Under **Spiritual Duties** in section 8 of article IV the ELC Constitution states:

*The duly elected members of the Church Board shall be qualified to assist the Pastor in the administration of the Sacraments and in general pastoral oversight of the Congregation. Church Board members who have served on the Board and have retired according to constitutional process **shall continue to be thus qualified.** It shall be understood that Church Board members who have been formally dedicated to their task bear the scripturally appointed offices of **Deacon and Elder.***

Even though the ELC Constitution affirms the office, function and title of elder and deacon, in practice the ELC does not and has not emphasized or affirmed either office. In essence then, the amending of the constitution had less to do with any substantive change and more to do with emphasis and living into what our constitution already affirms.

In practice, your ELC Board could have simply declared this change in emphasis and initiated a similar change in practice. Our intention and hope however was to educate and encourage the congregation to see the value and understand better the function of these Biblical leadership offices. To that end, a series of sermons on servant leadership was given (detailing the responsibilities of pastor, elder, deacon and congregation) and an open forum for questions and conversation offered on 3 separate occasions. During these conversations, no Biblical objection was raised regarding the aforementioned leadership roles.

While some questions have been raised about process, your Board would wish for all to be clear about what exactly is **not being changed** in the ELC Constitution:

- 1) The office of elder and deacon - already identified in title and responsibility in the ELC Constitution
- 2) Term of service - Elders and Deacons will continue to serve a two year term, once

renewable (potentially 4 years in total). You will notice in the Constitution the phrase - **continue to be thus qualified**. This simply means that once a person is ordained as a deacon, pastor or elder, they retain that title (and if needed, can be asked to serve communion, visit and pray for the sick or perform forms of Christian service) even though they are not presently installed. They would not attend ELC Board meetings and neither would they have the right to vote.

What has changed in your ELC Constitution:

- 1) All continuing and newly elected ELC Board members will be ordained and installed into either the office of elder or deacon.
- 2) Number of ELC Board members. Before the AGM, the number of Board members was set by the ELC Constitution at 10 (though we have been a Board of 8 for a number of years). The approved amendment affords the Board a bit more latitude - **no fewer than 8 and not greater than 14**.
- 3) That the total number of elders and deacons be an equal number
- 4) That the preferred composition of the ELC Church Board be 12 members (6 elders and 6 deacons) plus the incumbent pastor who shall serve as chairman.

For those who may be unclear about the value or function of these Biblical leadership offices or how they may differ from a typical Board position - we would simply affirm that Board members tend more often to fill an administrative role or function. While the call to leadership in the church is first and foremost a spiritual calling. The offices of pastor, elder or deacon arise from the Word and look to the Spirit and Word for direction in all things. While administration is an important aspect of leadership, the focus for the elder is primarily not administration, but spiritual oversight and prayer. The focus for the deacon is stewardship and benevolence and service.

In essence these roles should never be about power, prestige, popularity or position - but in and through entirely about service to Christ and His bride the Church. This is why the early church was so focused on spiritual maturity (not perfection) for those in leadership. Please see again how the Word describes the qualifications for leadership in the church:

Office of Elder (**I Peter 5:1-3, I Timothy 3:1-6, Titus 1:6-9**)

The office of the elder is one of **servanthood** and **service** representing Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. In the local church, elders are chosen members of spiritual discernment, exemplary life, charitable spirit, and wisdom grounded in God's Word.

Elders, together with the installed minister/s serving under a call, are to have supervision of the

church entrusted to them. They are set apart for a ministry of watchful and responsible care for all matters relating to the welfare and good order of the church. They are to study God's Word, to oversee the household of faith, to encourage spiritual growth, to maintain loving discipline, and to provide for the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments. They have oversight over the conduct of the members of the congregation and seek to bring that conduct into conformity with the Word of God, thereby empowering all members to live out their Christian vocation in the world. Elders exercise an oversight over the conduct of one another, and of the deacons, and of the minister/s. They make certain that what is preached and taught by the minister/s is in accord with the Holy Scripture. They assist the minister/s with their good counsel and in the task of care. They seek to guard the sacraments of the church from being profaned. An elder may administer the sacraments, if authorized by the board of elders.

Office of Deacon (**I Timothy 3:8-13, Acts 6:1-7**)

The office of the deacon is one of **servanthood** and **service** representing Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. In the local church deacons are chosen members of spiritual commitment, exemplary life, compassionate spirit, and sound judgment, who are set apart for a ministry of mercy, service, and outreach. They are to receive the contributions of the congregation and to distribute them under the direction of the ELC Board. The deacons give particular attention and care to the whole benevolence program of the church. They have charge of all gifts contributed for the benefit of the poor and distribute them with discretion. They visit and comfort those in material need and perform such other duties as the ELC Board may assign them.

Our hope is that these explanations are helpful and informative and that you will join us in prayerfully nominating leaders for the next season of ministry through the ELC.

Sincerely,

Your ELC Board

- We have included for your benefit, nomination forms for the offices of elder and deacon. We ask again that you prayerfully consider those ELC members who possess a serving spirit as well as the highlighted gifts. Given that we are in a season of transition, the time to submit nominees has been extended **to the end of April**. You may return your completed ballots to the ELC office or send them by WhatsApp or email.

