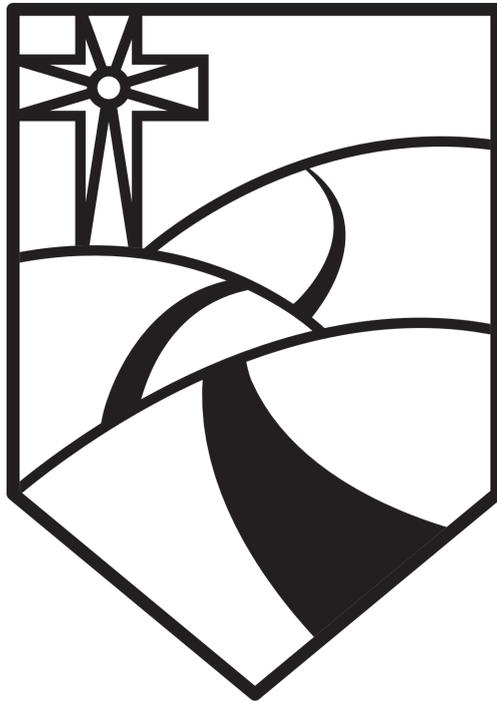


REALITY CHURCH ^{OF} STOCKTON



PATHS TO LEADERSHIP

*We exist to glorify God
by making disciples of all people.*



PATHS TO LEADERSHIP

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ELDERS AND DEACONS

We believe the church belongs to Christ and that He is the head of the church (Ephesians 1:22; Colossians 1:18). Under the leadership of Jesus, we practice a shared leadership model of church government, where it is led by qualified elders who shepherd, oversee, and teach the church body; as well as qualified deacons who serve alongside to carry out practical ministerial and administrative duties in the church.

The leadership that Jesus entrusts to his church is to function through these two offices: Elders and Deacons. In fact when Paul opens the letter to the Philippian church, he begins:

“To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons” Philippians 1:1

Elders (aka overseers) primarily lead through teaching, prayer, providing guidance and meeting spiritual needs.

Deacons primarily lead through meeting the physical needs and lead in their service.

When the church leadership is functioning in this capacity, the result tends to be that all the needs of the community are being met and the gospel is able to advance to reach those outside the body of believers.

QUALIFICATIONS

“God provides objective, observable qualifications to test the subjective desire of all who seek [an] office... Desire alone is not enough; it must be matched by good character and spiritual capability.” Alexander Strauch

ELDERS

It is crucial to the health and future of the local church that men are identified among the flock, whom God has called, gifted, and qualified to serve in the office of elder. The four biblical areas that are necessary to observe in the life of a man¹ who desires the office of elder at Reality Church are as follows:

Calling: An elder must be called.

“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.””

Acts 13:1-2

“shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;”

1 Peter 5:2

“No man may intrude into the sheepfold as an under-shepherd; he must have an eye to the chief Shepherd, and wait His beck and command. Or ever a man stands forth as God’s ambassador, he must wait for the call from above; and if he does not so, but rushes into the sacred office, the Lord will say of him, “I sent them not, neither commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the Lord.”

Charles Spurgeon

¹ God has made both men and women equally in His image, but there are distinctions in their roles in the church. Our position at Reality is influenced not by personal or cultural biases but by a careful reading of Scripture. This careful study of scripture has led us to see the office of elder being held by men. No other position in the church is necessarily restricted to men other than the office of elder.

Character: An elder must be a man of upright character.

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”

1 Timothy 3:1–7

“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.”

Titus 1:5–9

Competency: An elder must be a competent leader.

There is a unique authority and responsibility entrusted to elders. Every elder is to be a skilled teacher of Scripture, and must be capable of feeding the flock from God's word. The office also involves governing the affairs of the church, serving as a spiritual overseer, guardianship of sound doctrine, and refuting false doctrine.

An elder must be a proven student of God's word, "rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). The candidate must be "able to teach" (1 Tim 3:2). "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it" (Titus 1:9). He must be able to protect the flock from false doctrine and from wolves (Acts 20:28-30).

"...what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also." 2 Timothy 2:2

Compatibility: An elder must be a compatible leader.

It's possible for a man to be godly, faithful, called, and competent, but still not a good fit for the particular ministry and mission God has called our church to.

"On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised." Galatians 2:7-9

DEACONS

It is crucial to the health and future of the local church that men and women are identified among the flock, whom God has called, gifted, and qualified to serve in the office of deacon. Similar to the office of elder, deacons are those among the flock that exhibit calling, giftedness, and character fitting of the office. In Acts 6 when the Apostles called the church to appoint its first group of deacons, they called for individuals of “good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty” (Acts 6:3). Later in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul would explain these qualifications in greater detail:

Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. Their wives[or “women”] likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.
1 Timothy 3:8–13

Here we see that deacons “likewise” need to meet the same qualifications as elders with only one exception: being able to teach. At Reality Church, deacons are responsible for assisting the elders in helping them implement the overall mission of the church through practical acts of service. It is important to note that some teach that the Office of Deacon is reserved solely for men. At Reality, however, we believe this office is open to both men and women. The Apostle Paul, who penned this letter to Timothy under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, also wrote to the church in Rome commending Pheobe who was a deaconess at the church in Cenchreae. It is necessary for the overall health of the church that both men and women are represented in this office of leadership.

PROCESS OF BECOMING AN ELDER OR DEACON

ELDERS

There are multiple steps in the process of becoming an elder.

- 1. Identification:** This is the time for a person to be identified as a potential future elder of the church. Identification is generally a combination of personal desire for the office and the current elders seeing leadership gifts and character being displayed in someone that the community has already been following. Because an elder must be of good reputation, its vital that they have already begun to build a reputation of faithfulness in the small things. Additionally, some members will recommend a particular individual for eldership by communicating their recommendation to the board of elders¹.
- 2. Preliminary Application:** After an individual is identified, they will be asked to complete a Preliminary Application. This is a series of questions that help the current elders understand where an individual is in relationship to the time period they've been at Reality Church, their adherence to the doctrine of the church, and current involvement in serving the church body. This will involve questions about family (if applicable), doctrine, vocation, etc.
- 3. References:** After an individual is identified and they have completed a Preliminary Application, they will be given a ministry leader reference. This gives current leaders the ability to offer feedback on a person's life and ministry.

¹ Members are encouraged to communicate with the current leadership about those who are exhibiting leadership ability and godly character. Chances are, the members will see it before the leaders.

- 4. Formal Elder Process:** Depending on the outcome of the references, the elders will prayerfully consider enrolling them in the formal eldership process. This is a 6 - 12 month process of meeting with the current elders, training, mandatory reading, and other avenues of assessment. This will be the time where the elders identify whether or not a man is qualified in the area of calling, character, competence, and compatibility.
- 5. Elder Candidacy:** Upon successful completion of the formal elder process and the continual prayerful consideration of the elders, an individual will enter into the final stage of the process, Elder Candidacy. This will be an approximately 6 week long time of public testing, giving opportunity to the local church congregation to affirm character and calling in the life of a man desiring to be an elder. The candidacy will begin by being brought before the church for introductions. Over the course of these 6 weeks, the church will be invited to pray, discern, and communicate with the current elders². During this period of time, the elders will strongly consider and weigh the feedback of the church.
- 6. Ordination:** At the conclusion of the process, based on the successful completion of the candidacy³, an individual will be brought before the church and ordained as an elder of the church - a ceremony involving the laying on of hands and licensing for pastoral ministry.

² During the candidacy, all forms of encouragement, affirmation, concern, or questions are requested.

³ If for whatever reason, the elders identify areas of disqualification during this process, next steps will be explored - ranging from church discipline, a path of restoration, or simply being encouraged to serve in a role that doesn't include eldership - depending on the circumstance.

DEACONS

There are multiple steps in the process of becoming a deacon.

- 1. Identification:** This is the time for a person to be identified as a potential future deacon of the church. Identification is generally a combination of personal desire for the office and the current leadership(elders and/or deacons) seeing leadership gifts and character being displayed in someone that the community has already been following. Because a deacon must be of good reputation, its vital that they have already begun to build a reputation of faithfulness in the small things. Additionally, some members will recommend a particular individual for deaconship by communicating their recommendation to the board of elders¹.
- 2. Preliminary Application:** After an individual is identified, they will be asked to complete a Preliminary Application. This is a series of questions that help the current deacons understand where an individual is in relationship to the time period they've been at Reality Church, their adherence to the doctrine of the church, and current involvement in serving the church body. This will involve questions about family (if applicable), doctrine, vocation, etc.
- 3. References:** After an individual is identified and they have completed a Preliminary Application, they will be given a ministry leader reference and elder reference. This gives current leaders the ability to offer feedback on a person's life and ministry.

¹ Members are encouraged to communicate with the current leadership about those who are exhibiting leadership ability and godly character. Chances are, the members will see it before the leaders.

- 4. Formal Deacon Process:** Depending on the outcomes of the references, the deacons will prayerfully consider enrolling them in the formal deacon process. This is a 6 - 12 month process of meetings with the current deacons, training, mandatory reading, and other avenues of assessment. This will be the time where the deacons identify whether or not a man or woman is called and qualified to serve as a deacon.
- 5. Deacon Candidacy:** Upon successful completion of the formal deacon process and the continual prayerful consideration of the deacons, an individual will enter into the final stage of the process, Deacon Candidacy. This will be an approximately 6 week long time of giving opportunity to the elders to affirm character and calling in the life of a man or woman desiring to be a deacon. The candidacy will begin by meeting with the team of elders or a designated elder. Over the course of these 6 weeks, the elders will be invited to pray, discern, and communicate with the current deacons². At the end of this period of time, the deacons and elders will come to a decision together.
- 6. Appointing:** At the conclusion of the process, based on the successful completion of the candidacy,³ an individual will be brought before the church and appointed as a deacon of the church.

² During the candidacy, all forms of encouragement, affirmation, concern, or questions are requested.

³ If for whatever reason, the elders/deacons identify areas of disqualification during this process, next steps will be explored - ranging from church discipline, a path of restoration, or simply being encouraged to serve in a role that doesn't include the office of deacon - depending on the circumstance.



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