

# Elder Development Plan

CALVARY BAPTIST CHURCH  
DOTHAN, AL

## Calvary Baptist Church Elder Development Plan

*5 ... I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: <sup>2</sup> 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; <sup>3</sup> not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Peter 5:1-4)*

### PROCESS OVERVIEW

Our aim is to cultivate a congregational culture in which it is normal and good for all kinds of men to desire godly leadership. Yet bare aspiration is not enough. Scripture likewise teaches that an overseer must be also above reproach in his character, spiritually mature, a leader in his home, able to teach the Christian faith, and a willing shepherd.

With these qualifications in mind, the CBC Elder Development Program aims to guide qualified elder nominees from assessment to affirmation with a focus on confessional study and pastoral training. Designed for working men with families, nominated men may begin the program at any time. A typical nominee can expect the five-stage process to take six to twelve months, while certain men with prior theological training and ministry experience may require less time. Given the flexible nature of the program, multiple men can be in the program at the same time, progressing at different paces relative to their unique circumstances and needs.

This process emphasizes the following:

ASPIRATION

PREPARATION

PARTICIPATION

EXAMINATION

AFFIRMATION

We recognize that no man-made process ultimately creates elders. God does. While many men may aspire to the office, not every aspiring man may be gifted by God for such ministry. We pray God is pleased to use this process to create a clear path to equip aspiring men and affirm those whom He has gifted for elder ministry.

## **STAGE 1: ASPIRATION**

### *INTRODUCTION*

The goal of this initial stage is to notify men that they have been nominated to the office of elder and invite them to examine their aspirations, assess their spiritual maturity, test their Scriptural knowledge, and create a clear path to pastoral ministry for qualified men.

### *THE PROCESS*

Ideally, a man will complete the following steps within one to two months of receiving by email his “Aspiring Elder Questionnaire”:

- Step 1: Complete the “Aspiring Elder Questionnaire” mentioned above
- Step 2: Complete the “Aspiring Elder’s Wife’s Questionnaire” (nominee’s wife)
- Step 3: Complete the preparatory reading and writing (see below)
- Step 4: Meet with the sponsoring elder to discuss steps 1–3
- Step 5: Elder Council evaluation (see below)

### *PREPARATORY READING & WRITING*

The aspiring brother will read the following book and write a 1-2 page reflection paper. The reflection paper will be uploaded to a dedicated Google Drive folder visible only to the CBC elders.

- *Church Elders*, Jeramie Rinne

### *ELDER COUNCIL EVALUATION*

After an aspiring man completes Steps 1–4 (above), the sponsoring elder will submit a profile of the nominee to the CBC Elders during the next regularly scheduled elders’ meeting. This profile will include an initial evaluation of the man’s character, maturity, knowledge, and home.

A majority of elders must agree that the man is basically qualified to begin “Stage 2: Preparation” and begin his public process as a nominee. The elders will announce the nominee at the next members meeting.

## **STAGE 2: PREPARATION**

### *INTRODUCTION*

Upon approval from the council of elders for advancement, the aspiring man will begin the educational stage of the process. The goal of this second stage—the most substantial of five stages—is to make the nominee’s aspirations public to the congregation, and then develop and evaluate his pastoral and doctrinal aptitude.

Two parts are included in Stage 2: personal study and observation. Men who complete this stage may be eligible for advancement to “Stage 3: Participation,” pending approval from the council of elders.

### **PART 1 – PERSONAL STUDY**

#### *PASTORAL TRACK*

The pastoral study track introduces the essentials of Baptist identity, congregational polity, elder leadership, and ministry philosophy with a view toward orienting the aspiring man toward a ministry of Word and prayer.

The pace of study is assigned in advance with the expectation that he will take no more than six months to complete the track.

An aspiring man will typically read one book per month then write a 2–3-page reflection paper prior to meeting with the sponsoring elder for discussion. Nominees must complete the entire pastoral track before the council of elders will consider advancing him to “Stage 3: Participation.”

The scope and sequence for the pastoral track is as follows:

- *Elders in the Life of the Church*, Newton and Schmucker
- *How to Build a Healthy Church*, Dever
- *The Care of Souls*, Senkbeil

#### *CONFESSIONAL TRACK*

Every qualified elder must be able to teach sound doctrine and refute error (1 Tim 3:2; Tit. 1:9). Thus, every CBC elder must strictly subscribe to the *New Hampshire Baptist Confession* as our church’s doctrinal standard. To this end, the Confessional track guides the aspiring man through a self-paced comprehensive study of every section in the Confession with the expectation that he will take no more than six months to complete his work.

The nominee and his sponsoring elder will meet at least 3 times to discuss the *New Hampshire Baptist Confession*. These meetings may or may not concur with the Pastoral Track meetings listed above.

Unlike the Pastoral Track, completion of this track is not required for advancement to “Stage 3: Participation” but is required for “Stage 4: Examination.”

Primary text: *What Baptists Believe: The New Hampshire Confession, an Exposition*, O.C.S. Wallace

Secondary text: *Systematic Theology*, Grudem

## PART 2 - OBSERVATION

This second part of Stage 2 aims to couple the nominee's study with practical immersion in elder ministry. To this end, the aspiring man will be present to quietly observe monthly elder's meetings for the duration of his time in this stage. He may also join certain elders on pastoral visitations/meetings as his schedule permits and as circumstances allow.

### *ELDER COUNCIL EVALUATION*

After an aspiring man completes the Pastoral track and shows sufficient progress in the Confessional track, he will be evaluated by the CBC Elders during the next appropriate elders' meeting. His evaluation is focused on his personal character, theological and pastoral aptitude, and philosophical agreement with the elders.

A majority of the elder council must agree that the nominee is qualified for advancement to "Stage 3: Participation".

## **STAGE 3: PARTICIPATION**

### *INTRODUCTION*

Elder ministry requires a strong doctrinal foundation but is not merely an academic exercise. An aspiring man may be able to read and write about these things yet prove to lack the requisite qualifications for the office when tested. “Stage 3: Participation” builds on the theoretical foundations laid in the previous stage by testing his personal character and pastoral gifts.

In the course of six months or less, two primary responsibilities fall to the nominee during this stage: Participating in CBC elder ministry and finishing the confessional track.

### *PARTICIPATING IN ELDER MINISTRY*

- *Elder Meetings.*

Having been approved for advancement to this stage by the elder council upon his completion of the Pastoral track in Stage 2, the aspiring man must exhibit like-mindedness with the CBC Elder ministry philosophy.

In the previous stage, he merely observed monthly “business-centric” meetings. In this stage, he will participate in both “business-centric” and “member-centric” elder meetings as a non-voting member.

- *Pastoral Visitations/Meetings.*

The nominee will join another elder for appropriate in-home visitations, meetings in office, or other engagements with members of the congregation for the purpose of pastoral care.

Lord willing, from the beginning to end of this stage, the nominee will move from simply observing a visitation to facilitating them.

- *Public Teaching.*

While not every elder is gifted to preach the Word, every qualified man must be able to teach it in a faithful and beneficial way. To this end, the aspiring man will join the public teaching ministry of the elders. This may include but is not limited to teaching Open Classes, Life Groups, leading congregational assemblies, and preaching at least once.

### *ELDER COUNCIL EVALUATION*

After an aspiring man completes the Confessional track and sufficiently participates in regular elder ministry, he will be evaluated in absentia by the CBC Elders during the next appropriate elders’ meeting. His evaluation is focused on his theological convictions, possible confessional scruples or exceptions, pastoral giftedness, and personal chemistry with the sitting elder council.

Whereas a nominee’s advancement to the second and third stages required only a majority vote from the elder council, his advancement to “Stage 4: Examination” requires elder unanimity.

## **STAGE 4: EXAMINATION**

### *INTRODUCTION*

In stages 2 and 3, the aspiring man devoted himself to pastoral and confessional study and participated in CBC's elder ministry. The aim of this stage is to comprehensively examine a nominee's home, pastoral gifting, and confessional subscription with a view toward nominating qualified men for the office of elder.

### *PRIVATE EXAMINATION: THE MAN'S HOME*

The program began with both the nominee and his wife completing questionnaires that included inquiries into their home and the man's fitness for elder ministry. It ends with a capstone interview for the aspiring couple with the elder council.

Areas of interest include but are not limited to:

- How have the nominee and his wife managed the added pressure and commitment of the process, which aimed, in part, to test their marriage for the greater burdens accompanying elder ministry?
- Does his wife clearly understand the calling and duties of an elder, and her role as a support and encouragement to her husband in his ministry?
- In what ways might the nominee's wife require special care and encouragement from either the church or the elder board if her husband is affirmed as an elder?
- If they have children, has he remained committed to their spiritual instruction during his time in the program? If so, how has it possibly changed or improved?
- What is the financial condition of their home compared to when they began the program?
- Is the nominee currently looking for other employment or is his current employment at risk such that he would be unable to complete a full term as elder, if affirmed?

### *PUBLIC EXAMINATION: THE MAN'S MINISTRY*

After a private examination of the nominee and his wife, the aspiring man will be publicly examined before the CBC congregation. His public examination consists of two parts: pastoral gifting and confessional subscription.

#### **PART 1—EXAMINING HIS PASTORAL GIFTING**

Every qualified elder is both a doctrinally sound teacher and a spiritually gifted shepherd. Such gifted men consistently demonstrate instinctive care for God's people and take initiative to pray for fellow church members and edify them with God's Word. One part of a nominee's public examination focuses on his pastoral gifting.

During a Q&A before attending CBC members, he will aim to demonstrate his pastoral instincts and articulate his philosophy of ministry by answering questions that include but are not limited to topics such as:

- Discipleship, missions, and the purpose of the church
- Caring for the hurting
- Navigating church discipline
- Evaluating prospective members
- The goals of pastoral visitation
- Enduring criticism and discouragement
- CBC's strategy and plans
- His personal desires for the future of CBC

## PART 2—EXAMINING HIS CONFSSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION

In addition to his pastoral gifting, the nominee must demonstrate a strict subscription to the New Hampshire Baptist Confession. "Strict subscription," does not entail subscribing to every word or clause in the Confession but to every doctrine, without exception. Moreover, it does not imply that one weighs or understands every doctrine in the Confession equally but demonstrates a personal commitment to every doctrine.

During a Q&A with CBC members, the nominee will answer questions including but not limited to the following topics:

- Can he publicly affirm a strict subscription to the NHC
- Revealing his personal scruples toward particular parts of the NHC
- Explaining and applying key doctrines in the Confession

## *PUBLIC NOMINATION*

Following the nominee's examination, he may be publicly presented to the congregation as a candidate for the office of elder at the next CBC member's meeting, pending unanimous approval from the board of elders.

Regarding the nomination of elder candidates, the CBC Constitution & Bylaws prescribes the following process:

### *Selection of the Council of Elders*

*The church will solicit nominations for the Council of Elders during the month of August each year. Church members may submit nominations for the Council of Elders at any time.*

*Only men who have completed elder training will be eligible for selection for the Council of Elders.*

*The Council of Elders will interview and assess the nominations and present the congregation with the candidates at a regular members meeting.*



## **STAGE 5: AFFIRMATION**

After a candidate is publicly presented (see Stage 4), the congregation will have at least one month to prayerfully consider the man and his qualifications with a view toward affirming the elder council's final list of candidates at the next duly called member's meeting: (From bylaws)

*Council of Elders shall solicit written, signed comments relating to the list of candidates for 30 days following the members meeting where the candidate(s) are presented. The Council of Elders shall present the final list of candidates to the congregation after the 30-day comment period.*

*After prayerful consideration, the congregation will vote on the candidates at the next regular members meeting. Only members of the Church may vote.*

*The vote shall be yea or nay by written ballot on each of the nominees separately.*

*Congregational approval of each candidate shall be at least 75% of all ballots cast.*

*Following congregational approval, an elder will immediately join the Council of Elders.*

Upon receiving the required affirmative votes from the members, the newly elected elder will immediately begin serving his first term. At the next Lord's Day gathering, the sitting elder council will lay hands on the man after he makes his public vows of office.

The terms of service are as follows: (from bylaws)

*A Lay Elder may serve 2 consecutive 3-year terms but must be reaffirmed by written ballot of the Church before starting their second 3-year term.*

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## CHECKLIST

### STAGE 1: ASPIRATION

- Step 1: Complete the “Aspiring Elder Questionnaire” mentioned above
- Step 2: Complete the “Aspiring Elder’s Wife’s Questionnaire” (nominee’s wife)
- Step 3: Reflection Paper: *Church Elders*, Rinne
- Step 4: Meet with the sponsoring elder to discuss steps 1–3
- Step 5: Elder Council evaluation

### STAGE 2: PREPARATION

- Reflection Paper: Elders in the Life of the Church*, Newton and Schmucker
- Reflection Paper: How to Build a Healthy Church*, Dever
- Reflection Paper: The Care of Souls*, Senkbeil
- Sponsoring Elder Meeting 1, Pastoral Track and Confessional Track
- Sponsoring Elder Meeting 2, Pastoral Track and Confessional Track
- Sponsoring Elder Meeting 3, Pastoral Track and Confessional Track
- Subsequent Sponsoring Elder Meetings (if needed/desired)
- Observation of at least 3 monthly elders’ meetings
- Elder Council Evaluation and agreement to progress to stage 3

### STAGE 3: PARTICIPATION

- Participating in Elder Meetings (at least 3 elder meetings)
- Participating in Elder Visitation/meetings (at least 3)
- Participating in Public Teaching (6 classroom settings, 1 preaching)
- Elder Council Evaluation and unanimous agreement to progress to stage 4

### STAGE 4: EXAMINATION

- Nominee and his wife interviewed by Elder Council
- Public Q&A led by elders
- Nominee answers members’ questions at Members Meeting
- Presentation to church as candidate for Elder

### STAGE 5: AFFIRMATION

- After 30 days, church will vote to affirm final list of candidates as elders
- Upon receiving affirmation, candidate begins serving as elder immediately