

Three Rivers Presbyterian Church
Foundations
Church Polity

Membership Vows – Question 5

5. Do you submit yourselves to the government and discipline of the Church, and promise to study its purity and peace?

What is the form of church government to which I will submit?

- Three forms of church government
 1. Episcopal (hierarchical structure)
 2. Congregation (Baptist, independent, non-denominational)
 3. Presbyterian (representational)

- Three Church Courts
 1. Session: Local court composed of active ruling elders, teaching elder (pastor), and associate pastor, assistant pastors (not technically part of the session)
 - Accountable to God for the local congregation
 - The court with which church members typically interact
 - Meets regularly
 2. Presbytery: Regional court composed of teaching elders and churches
 - Typically meets 3-4 times per year
 - Open to general public!
 3. General Assembly: National court of all teaching elders and churches in denomination
 - Typically meets once a year

Who are the officers of the church?

- Elders: office of shepherding, teaching, governing, spiritual oversight (1 Tim 3; Titus 1)
 - Teaching Elders: Called and gifted by God to read, expound, and preach Word, as well as administer the sacraments
 - Ruling Elders: Called and gifted by God to shepherd, guide, and rule the congregation as well as teach the Word
 - Equal authority (parity) of two types of elders!

- Deacons: Office of service and sympathy (1 Tim. 3; Acts 6:1-7)
 - Deacons minister to the sick and needy, develop grace of liberality in congregation, distribute gifts received from the congregation, care for property

- Both offices are spiritual and perpetual (You can't revoke your office, although you can resign from active participation or be removed from it).
- Role of Women: Complementarian
 - Gifts of women should be utilized in the church
 - In light of 1 Cor. 11-14, 1 Tim. 2-3, and Titus 1, PCA teaches women should not be ordained as ruling or teaching elders in church.
 - Debate exists about office of deacon (Rom. 16:1, 1 Tim. 3), but currently PCA holds women may not be ordained to the office of deacon (1 Tim. 3:8-12).
 - Godly women can be selected by the session to serve as assistants to the deacons. These assistants are not officers of the church and are not subject to ordination (BCO 9-7).
 - Formal vs. informal power in the church

What is Church Discipline?

- Definition: Discipline is the exercise of authority given the church by the Lord Jesus Christ to instruct and guide its members and to promote its purity and welfare (BCO 27-1)
- Purpose: To bring glory to God, to purify the church, and the restoration of disobedient sinners (1 Cor. 5:5; 11:32; Heb. 12:5-11)
- Procedure: To follow the process of church discipline outlined in Matt. 18:15-20.
 - Instruction in the Word
 - Individual's responsibility to admonish one another (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1)
 - If admonition is rejected, then the calling of one or more witnesses (Matt. 18:16)
 - If rejection persists, then the church must act through her court unto admonition, suspension, excommunication, and deposition.