

APPENDIX I

DEVELOPING THE ELDERSHIP – 2018 UPDATE

A. Executive Summary

The Eldership Working Group, operating within the Mission and Discipleship Council, reports below on the progress made in addressing the action points given to it by the 2017 General Assembly and makes the following proposals:

- That Kirk Sessions be urged to embrace the fresh vision for eldership which is a role that is primarily focused on local contextual mission and distinctively concerned with the discipleship of God's people.
- That Kirk Sessions be encouraged, when seeking new elders, to engage with this fresh vision to identify potential elders with diverse giftings and from a variety of ages and backgrounds.
- That Kirk Sessions urge elders to engage with the resources, as they become available, that enable them to be proactive about their individual, congregational and leadership responsibilities in the area of encouraging a contextualised Church-wide active discipleship culture.
- That Kirk Sessions be encouraged to use the new resources available to assist with streamlining their approach to addressing vital administrative tasks.
- Assuming that the work undertaken by the Legal Question Committee supports this, the appropriate committee develops a formal process that will provide a recognised means by which elders can continue to be actively involved in the life of a congregation, without the associated obligations of trusteeship that come from being an elder on the Kirk Session.

B. Background

The purpose of the Eldership Working Group (EWG) has been 'to look at patterns and models of Eldership currently in use across the Church today and to bring to the attention of the General Assembly ways in which these could be shared, reflected upon and, in some cases, adapted to encourage appropriate practice in our changing contexts'.

The proposals made by the EWG to the General Assembly of 2017, contained in Appendix III of the report of the Mission and Discipleship Council (MDC) (Appendix III, section 20 <https://goo.gl/1agjuN>), were approved. They provided a clear focus for the group's work in supporting and developing the eldership, which can be summarised as follows:

- That the EWG develops support provision that is informed by the overall vision of the office of eldership as being one that is shaped by local contextual mission and distinctively concerned with the discipleship of God's people.
- That, as key leaders in our denomination, it is not competent to separate trusteeship from eldership. However, the EWG should provide guidance on new and improved ways to carry out vital administrative tasks, which are required by civil and Church of Scotland law under which elders operate.
- That a process be formalised whereby an elder can resign from the Kirk Session and thereafter the Kirk Session may, if appropriate, appoint the elder as a non-governing emeritus elder.

This report on developing the eldership provides specific details on how the above areas of focus are being addressed.

C. Discipleship: A fresh vision for eldership

The whole Church is being called to nurture an active discipleship culture, as reported by the Mission and Discipleship Council to the 2018 General Assembly (Mission and Discipleship Council report to the 2018 General Assembly). The significance of this for elders is threefold:

C.1 Individual responsibility

Elders are responsible, as are all in our congregations, for proactively considering how they are progressing in their walk with Christ. Whether first exploring a call to the eldership or continuing to serve in active response to this call, we travel alongside the Christ who continues to call us to 'follow me'. This is an ongoing and dynamic relationship that changes as our relationship with Christ, context and understanding of the call develops.

The EWG has collated a variety of examples of the way in which congregations enable discernment and support the call to eldership.

C.2 Congregational responsibility

When the role of elder becomes distinctively concerned with the discipleship of God's people, then elders, acting within the Kirk Session, become actively engaged with nurturing a discipleship culture within the congregation. This will involve taking a proactive interest in the Christian development of individuals and playing a strategic role that addresses which approach, support and resources are required to encourage a contextualised Church-wide active discipleship culture.

The Mission and Discipleship Council is developing guidance to enable elders to take a strategic overview for nurturing active discipleship in individuals and the congregation.

C.3 Leadership responsibility

As discussed in the Mission and Discipleship Council report to the 2018 General Assembly, the evidence is that it will require people to be supported to 'take the lead' in nurturing an active discipleship culture. Hence, as key leaders in a congregation, elders have a significant role to play, not necessarily in doing the work required, but in creating space, giving permission and facilitating others to do so. Elders will need to operate as effective leaders who recognise the gifts and skills in others, and then empower and support them to take the lead and 'go and make disciples'. Indeed, this should be a significant by-product of moving into a culture of whole-life active discipleship where people grow and develop in the outworking of their own discipleship. The EWG hopes that this fresh vision of eldership will enable Kirk Sessions to identify potential elders with a greater variety of gifts, from a wider variety of backgrounds and age-groups in congregations. Christ equips all his followers for works of service, and elders can operate as key leaders to facilitate this.

An important strand of the Mission and Discipleship Council's discipleship provision for congregations will be the equipping of all those who are to 'take the lead' in nurturing active discipleship.

D. Resourcing

The Mission and Discipleship Council is in the process of developing eldership training provision in the areas of 'call'; 'preparing to serve' and 'ongoing support and development'. These will be made available through a variety of channels including a dedicated section on the Church of Scotland website, conferences and publications.

D.1 Call

The EWG has collated examples of how different congregations have gone about identifying potential new elders, helping their discernment process, accessing what skills and gifts they have (or have potential to develop) and then enabling them into that area of service. The responses, which are offered to the Church to enable reflection on good practice, are available on the Church of Scotland website.

Each response is shaped around how potential elders have been enabled to consider the following four elements in a call to their ministry as an elder:

- The nature of the individual's call to grow in their walk with Christ through personal active discipleship.
- The inner call by which the individual feels motivated to serve in a particular way. This describes how the individual has gone about discerning their call to eldership.
- The providential call, whereby the gifts and skills to sustain ministry are evident in the individual. This describes how new elders have been helped to discern their gifts and skills.
- The ecclesiastical call, whereby the call is recognised and made by the Church. This describes the process that the Kirk Session, congregation and/or minister go through in identifying the call of an individual to become an elder.

D.2 Preparing to Serve

The EWG decided that the 'Learn: Eldership' publication (find out more about the publication at <https://goo.gl/KAuAtc>) and associated web pages should be used to equip elders preparing to serve in the role, and there was no immediate requirement for new material.

D.3 Ongoing support and development

The Council has a range of resources available, or in development, for the ongoing support and development of elders. For example:

- The 'Learn: Pastoral Care' conference (engage in some learning from this conference at <https://goo.gl/PPZGfP>) and publication (soon to be available via <https://goo.gl/nJXn4p>).
- Various faith formation and sharing resources ('Learn: Exploring Faith' publication <https://goo.gl/JCz4G3>), 'Learn: Understanding our Faith' publication (<https://goo.gl/GmXN2M>) and the 'Sharing Faith' resource (<https://goo.gl/2R33oE>).
- The regular national Elders conference (engage in some learning from this conference at <https://goo.gl/PPZGfP>).

- Other 'Learn Online' provision (<https://goo.gl/eKfZ4J>).
- The 'Office Bearers' section of the Church of Scotland website (<https://goo.gl/uGrkmw>).
- Materials prepared for worship development (<https://goo.gl/1iydj>).

The EWG proposes that the eldership section of the Church of Scotland website should be significantly developed to make all the above support and development provision readily accessible.

In general, there is a growing amount of useful and highly relevant material available online on the Church of Scotland website and the EWG recommends that emphasis be given to effectively communicating this to the Church to enable it to be accessed by as many people as possible.

E. Trusteeship

The EWG has recognised that many congregations have concerns about the burden of carrying out administrative tasks, however, the EWG also note that due to the nature of civil and Church of Scotland law applied to congregations as registered charities it is not competent to separate trusteeship from eldership.

E.1 Streamlining

The Mission and Discipleship Council has produced two new guidance documents which enable Kirk Sessions to look afresh at congregational administrative requirements, particularly for the circumstances where certain skills may be in short supply. These guidance documents, 'Church Organisation from Scratch' (Church Organisation from Scratch <https://goo.gl/tEJR9G>) and 'Frequently Asked Questions to the General Trustees Department' (Frequently Asked Questions to the General Trustees Department <https://goo.gl/zVZs7F>), provide clarity about the requirements for specific roles (such as treasurer) or aspects of Church (such as buildings and fabric). Although initially produced with the rural context in mind, the guidance provided is of broader relevance.

Contained within these is the perfectly appropriate concept that, whilst elders as trustees are ultimately responsible for certain administrative functions, there is a difference between being responsible for doing the tasks and making sure that they are carried out competently, by whoever is judged to be competent.

The EWG recommends that Kirk Sessions creatively consider areas of administrative work that they may be able to delegate to others, or possibly share between a number of congregations, thereby enabling Kirk Sessions to spread the burden, draw upon the gifts of others and wherever possible enable elders to focus on other aspects of their call, such as nurturing an active discipleship culture.

E.2 Elder Emeritus

The EWG has been in discussion with the Legal Questions Committee (LQC) on the subject of Elder Emeritus status. Specifically, it has asked that a formal mechanism, by which someone transfers to the non-governing Elders Emeritus status, be formally recognised in an Act of the Church. This is for circumstances when an elder considers it appropriate, through age or infirmity, to step back from active service as a member of the Kirk Session. The LQC is currently undertaking a review of the Church Courts Act (Act III 2000), starting with a consultation process which is seeking comment from across the Church. The LQC has intimated that the issue of Elder Emeritus may well be addressed in any new legislation. The intention in seeking formalisation of this process is that it will provide a recognised means by which elders can continue to be actively involved in the life of a congregation without the associated obligations of trusteeship that come from being an elder on the Kirk Session.

F. Proposals Arising

The EWG seeks affirmation from the General Assembly of the following proposals arising from its most recent work:

- That Kirk Sessions be urged to embrace the fresh vision for eldership; which is a role that is primarily focused on local contextual mission and distinctively concerned with the discipleship of God's people.
- That Kirk Sessions be encouraged, when seeking new elders, to engage with this fresh vision to identify potential elders with diverse giftings and from a variety of ages and backgrounds.
- That Kirk Sessions urge elders to engage with the resources, as they become available, that enable them to be proactive about their individual, congregational and leadership responsibilities in the area of encouraging a contextualised Church-wide active discipleship culture.
- That Kirk Sessions be encouraged to use the new resources available to assist with streamlining their approach to addressing vital administrative tasks.
- Assuming that the work undertaken by the LQC supports this, the appropriate committee develops a formal process that will provide a recognised means by which elders can continue to be actively involved in the life of a congregation, without the associated obligations of trusteeship that come from being an elder on the Kirk Session

The Eldership Working Group
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