

Antioch Presbyterian Church Officer Training Outline

Phase 1: Vetting (3 Weeks)

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Lesson 2 – The Respective Functions & Vocations of Church Officers

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Lesson 8 – Worship in the PCA

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Lesson 10 – Benevolence in Diaconal Ministry

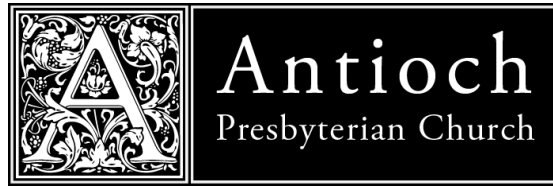
Lesson 11 – Church Discipline in the PCA & Peacemaking

Lesson 12 – Conclusion & the Spiritual Mission of the Church

Phase 3: Practical Training (8 Weeks)

Phase 4: Examination & Election

Phase 5: Installation & Ordination



Antioch Presbyterian Church Officer Training

Congratulations on being nominated to serve as an officer (i.e., elder or deacon) at Antioch! This means people already see in you some of the character traits and leadership skills necessary for ordained service in Christ's church. The next several months of training will clarify whether God is calling you to serve in this capacity.

Time Requirements

This training has a considerable time requirement, similar to taking a night class on top of whatever job or personal commitments you have during the day. We have intentionally designed this training as a kind of 'stress test' of ability and availability to juggle new commitments so that you are prepared to serve Christ's church. The good news is that if you complete the training and step into ordained ministry as either an elder or a deacon, you will find that most (but not all) months as an officer are much less time-consuming. There will be times when greater commitments of time are necessary. Making it through this training ought to give you confidence that you can make it through those times as well.

This training takes priority over other commitments in the church. You may need to step back from some of these other commitments during this training. If you sense you will be unable to do this training and fulfill your other commitments around the church, talk to one of the pastors about how we can adjust things.

Our first front of ministry is in our homes; this is why Paul requires that both elders and deacons manage their households well. Officers in the church minister well in their homes; we as a church recognize that and say, "We want more people to be able to experience the type of care that man provides to himself and to his family." But you need to be able to care for the church without neglecting yourself and your family. Officers serve through the overflow of what is left after caring well for their households. This training will give you a sense of how much capacity you have to serve as an officer in the church.

Another requirement for the elder is to be self-controlled, which includes control over how you spend your personal time. One of the particularly difficult tasks about serving as an officer is that you are probably doing it on top of a number of other commitments. Learning to manage your time is vital for accomplishing the work of an elder or deacon. Two books that many have found to be helpful

regarding time management are *What's Best Next: How the Gospel Transforms the Way You Get Things Done* by Matthew Perman and *Getting Things Done* by David Allen. There are other resources as well.

Serving in the church will often mean saying 'no' to other things. Think about it. Who of us has an extra four hours each week where we wish we had something to do? It is naïve to think there will not be sacrifices of time, attention, energy, and treasure. When the sacrifices threaten things that are more important, it may mean you need to step back for a time. This is why we have a sabbatical policy. Annually, each unpaid officer will sit for a meeting specifically designated to 'check-in' and assess whether it is time for a sabbatical (typically lasting either six or twelve months). Sabbaticals are times to recharge, pursue other interests or areas of Christian service, and hopefully return to the functions of the office with a new enthusiasm to serve. This is *not* term eldership or deaconship.

As long as your priorities are in order, the sacrifices you make in service to Christ as an ordained officer are worth it. The time spent studying in the evenings to be able to feed God's people in corporate meetings, the lunch meetings with someone exploring Christianity, the time with a young couple struggling in their marriage, and even the hours spent reviewing agendas, parliamentary procedure, church policies, and meeting minutes are investments in God's everlasting kingdom. You are participating in a work that will last forever. In short, you are lifting people's eyes up from where their current circumstances are to the throne of heaven where they can behold their God and grow more into the likeness of Christ. What could be worth more than that?

Absences

Your ability to attend this training is one of the ways you will know if you have the time to serve as a church officer. If you discover that your schedule does not allow you to make all of the training, it *may* be an indication that you are not called to serve *at this time*, even if you are qualified in every other way. If you know you will miss any of the training sessions, please notify the pastors as soon as possible.

Book List

Westminster Standards & Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in America

Developing a Healthy Prayer Life by James W. Beeke & Joel R. Beeke (99pp.)

The Shepherd Leader by Timothy Z. Witmer (268pp.) or *The Deacon* by Cornelius Van Dam (256pp.)

In the Shadow of Plenty: Biblical Principles for Caring for the Poor by George Grant (200pp.)

Book Review Papers

Some of the assigned reading will require a reflective book review. Address three items in the review:

1. What is the main point (or, what are the main themes) of the book?
2. What is something that gave new insight or was particularly helpful in the book? Why?
3. What is something that you disagree with, or think could be stated better? Why?

Book reviews should be a minimum of two pages double-spaced, and a maximum of four pages.

Phase 1: Vetting (3 Weeks)

We are primarily concerned that you meet the character qualifications laid out in Scripture and have a desire (an internal sense of call) to serve Christ and His church as an ordained officer. During this phase, the names of all the participants in the class will be kept private in order to make it easier to withdraw if you find that you are either uninterested or otherwise unqualified to serve as an officer.

Lesson 1 – Introduction & Church Officer Qualifications

- Introduction to the training
- Understanding the character qualifications
- Provide contact info for references (wife + one other person, preferably a coworker)

Lesson 2 – The Respective Functions & Vocations of Church Officers

- Assignments due:
 - Character self-assessment
 - Begin *Developing a Healthy Prayer Life* (one chapter per day)
- The functions of elders and deacons at Antioch
- The callings of elders and deacons at Antioch

Lesson 3 – The Westminster Standards for Church Officers

- Assignments due:
 - Calling assignment
 - Read the *Westminster Standards*
 - Compile and email a list of all questions at least one day before the class
 - Note especially any areas of potential or actual disagreement; give biblical basis for your disagreement, if possible
- Review assignments together

Phase 2: Teaching (9 Weeks)

If you have made it this far, you have the basic character and calling needed to serve as an elder or deacon at Antioch. Now, we want to dig deeper into understanding how the church works: its theology and its commitments regarding the offices of elder and deacon. This phase will seem a lot like school, but it is giving you the foundations needed to succeed in phase three, where you will start doing the work of an elder or deacon. In this phase, we will present your names to the congregation so they can be observing, supporting, and praying for you.

Officer Mentor Assignment

During this phase, you will be assigned a mentor from among our current officers to meet with you, pray for you, and encourage you in this training process. They will also serve as a helpful resource to you for any questions you have about serving as an officer at Antioch.

Lesson 4 – Bible Knowledge for Church Officers

- Assignments due:
 - Bible knowledge assignment
 - Read Part 1 of *The Shepherd Leader* (Intro. & chs. 1-4) or *The Deacon* (Intro & chs. 1-2)
- *Faithful to the Scriptures*: Bible overview
- Set dates for training exercises

Lesson 5 – Reformed Theology for Church Officers

- Assignments due:
 - Read Part 2 of *The Shepherd Leader* (chs. 5-8) or *The Deacon* (chs. 3-6)
- *True to the Reformed Faith*: overview of Reformed theology

Lesson 6 – PCA Polity & History for Church Officers

- Assignments due:
 - Read *The Book of Church Order* (chs. 1-26; *Form of Government*); compile and email a list of all questions, comments, and concerns at least one day before the class
 - Read Part 3 of *The Shepherd Leader* (chs. 9-11) or *The Deacon* (chs. 7-8)
- PCA polity & history
- Contemporary issues in the PCA

Lesson 7 – Plurality, Collegiality, & Shepherding in the Church

- Assignments due:
 - Finish reading *The Shepherd Leader* (Concl. & Appendices) or *The Deacon* (chs. 9-13)
 - Book review of *The Shepherd Leader* or *The Deacon*
- Church leadership and healthy plurality
- Antioch's shepherding plan for pastoral care

Lesson 8 – Worship in the PCA

- Assignments due:
 - Read *The Book of Church Order* (chs. 47-63; *Directory for Worship*); compile and email a list of all questions, comments, and concerns at least one day before the class
- Planning, leading, and facilitating worship in the PCA

Lesson 9 – Diaconal Ministry Introduction & Overview

- Assignments due:
 - Read Part 1 of *In the Shadow of Plenty* (Intro. & chs. 1-10)
- Introduction to diaconal ministry at Antioch

Lesson 10 – Benevolence in Diaconal Ministry

- Assignments due:
 - Read Part 2 of *In the Shadow of Plenty* (chs. 11-13)

- Benevolence ministry at Antioch

Lesson 11 – Church Discipline in the PCA & Peacemaking

- Assignments due:
 - Read *The Book of Church Order* (chs. 27-46; *Rules of Discipline*); compile and email a list of all questions, comments, and concerns at least one day before the class
- Church discipline as an indispensable instrument of reproof, reconciliation, and restoration

Lesson 12 – Conclusion & the Spiritual Mission of the Church

- Assignments due:
 - Reflection paper (4-8 pages) on the class, your sense of call, and unanswered questions
- *Obedient to the Great Commission*: bringing it all together in service to Christ

Phase 3: Practical Training (8 Weeks)

This is where you will be able to put into practice what you have learned over the last twelve weeks. If you find that this phase is enjoyable and exciting, that is a great confirmation of your calling to the office which you are presently pursuing. In this phase, you will be doing the work of either an elder or a deacon. This phase is also when the congregation will be able to see you in action and give you encouragement.

Elder Track

- Lead a prayer meeting
- Teach in Sunday School
- Meet with someone one-on-one for discipleship (*at least four sessions*)
- Contact prayer list
- Attend an officers' meeting
- Hospital or home visit with a pastor
- Membership interview (*real or mock*)

Deacon Track

- Organize a service/work day at the church or in the community
- Recruit people for volunteer opportunities and manage a rotation (*for at least four weeks*)
- Help with benevolence cases (*if applicable*)

Final Assessment

You will meet with the pastors to review your progress so far and to determine if you should proceed with the formal examination (by the session) and election (by the congregation).

Phase 4: Examination & Election

Phase 5: Installation & Ordination

Much of the following is taken from BCO 24-6: In a worship service before the congregation, you will be asked these questions:

1. Do you believe the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as originally given, to be the inerrant Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice?
2. Do you sincerely receive and adopt the *Confession of Faith* and the *Catechisms* of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures; and do you further promise that if at any time you find yourself out of accord with any of the fundamentals of this system of doctrine, you will, on your own initiative, make known to your Session the change which has taken place in your views since the assumption of this ordination vow?
3. Do you approve of the form of government and discipline of the Presbyterian Church in America, in conformity with the general principles of biblical polity?
4. Do you accept the office of ruling elder (or deacon, as the case may be) in this church, and promise faithfully to perform all the duties thereof, and to endeavor by the grace of God to adorn the profession of the Gospel in your life, and to set a worthy example before the Church of which God has made you an officer?
5. Do you promise subjection to your brethren in the Lord?
6. Do you promise to strive for the purity, peace, unity and edification of the Church?

Then, the congregation will be asked:

Do you, the members of this church, acknowledge and receive this brother as a ruling elder (or deacon), and do you promise to yield him all that honor, encouragement and obedience in the Lord to which his office, according to the Word of God and the Constitution of this Church, entitles him?

The Antioch session will then lay hands on you, pray for you, extend the right hand of fellowship to you, and the Moderator of the session will say:

I now pronounce and declare that _____ has been regularly elected, ordained and installed a ruling elder (or deacon) in this church, agreeable to the Word of God, and according to the Constitution of the Presbyterian Church in America; and that as such he is entitled to all encouragements, honor and obedience in the Lord: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Congratulations! Now, the real work begins!

N.B. Though this program of officer training is a product of Antioch Presbyterian Church (PCA), we are indebted to Pastor Jon Stoddard and the leadership of Jordan Valley Presbyterian Church (PCA) for much of the foregoing material in terms of organization, verbiage, and layout.