

The organization of City Reformed Presbyterian

Our church has several groups that make decisions and run programs. This is a short summary of the duties and scope of each. These each meet separately, but also interact with each other as described below:

- Session (pastors and elders)
- Diaconate (deacons)
- Women's ministry council
- Church staff
- Committees
- Community group leadership

1. Session

Session is comprised of all of the elders. Elders must be men who meet the biblical criteria given in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. There are two types of elders:

Pastoral staff. Pastors are paid by the church; some are full-time and some are part-time and also work for other ministries. They are technically not members of our church; they belong to our local *Presbytery* which consists of representatives of about 25 churches in the Pittsburgh area. Their training normally includes three years of seminary and at least one year of internship, after which they must pass a number of written and oral examinations by our local Presbytery of our denomination. Afterwards they are *ordained* by laying on of hands.

There are three categories of pastor on Session. *Assistant pastors* are hired directly by Session and can be dismissed by Session. They do not have a vote on Session. *Associate pastors* must be nominated by a committee of church members and voted on by the membership. They can only be dismissed by Presbytery, after a request from the local church. They are full voting members of Session. There is one *senior pastor*, who is nominated and voted on in the same way as associate pastors. The senior pastor chairs the Session meetings; in his absence another pastor may chair the meetings. He also has a vote on Session.

The *RUF pastor* is not part of our Session; he is a direct employee of our Presbytery, reporting to an oversight board appointed by them. He is also ordained, by Presbytery.

All pastors are expected to be able to teach, and so are also called *teaching elders*. This is not just preaching in church, but also teaching in small groups and one-on-one counseling. Pastors may also be called to run various ministries as delegated by Session.

Ruling elders. Ruling elders are not paid by the church for their work, although some may serve also as paid *church staff*, discussed below. They are nominated by any members of the church and are trained and examined by the Session in the areas of Bible knowledge, theological knowledge, and personal Christian experience, after which they are voted on by the membership. They are *ordained* to their office in a manner similar to

teaching elders. They normally serve a three-year term, after which they can be re-elected any number of times. If they do not continue serving on Session, they are still ordained, and known as *inactive elders*, and can still be asked by Session to help in various church activities.

Ruling elders also make up the *Board of Trustees* of the official *non-profit corporation*. The corporation is the official entity recognized by the government, which holds the assets and tax liabilities of the church; pastors and staff are employees of this corporation.

Session sometimes invites *ministry interns* and *ruling-elder interns* to sit in on session meetings, without a vote. Interns are appointed by session and may be paid staff or volunteers.

Duties of Session. Session is the highest local authority in our church. All decisions and policies of the church ultimately are their responsibility, although much is delegated to other groups discussed below.

Direct responsibilities of Session include:

- deciding on the budget of the church
- deciding on salaries (pastors and elders recuse themselves from any discussion regarding their own salary or salaries of family members)
- deciding on the liturgy of worship services
- any *church discipline* cases that arise when a member has been accused of sin
- receiving reports from staff, committees, deacons, and women's council
- directly organizing teaching events on special topics
- writing position and policy papers on topics of concern to the church
- examinations of all leaders in the church
- oversight of the community groups and appointing their leaders
- appointing committee members, adult education teachers, and volunteer coordinators
- interviewing and hiring paid staff
- pastorally being aware of how members are doing and making sure none are "falling through the cracks"
- setting the overall vision and philosophy of our church
- attending local Presbytery meetings and serving on local and national committees of our denomination.

Session's authority is not just administrative, but spiritual. Their authority can be viewed as threefold:

- *Decisional* authority. The Session is the final "buck stops here" decision-making body.
- *Teaching* authority. Official teaching from Session, whether sermons, Bible lessons, or position papers, are not just their personal opinion, but speaking in the place of the church, to say what is the correct interpretation of the Bible.
- *Discipling* authority. Session members talking with individual members do not give commands, but their advice should be treated with respect and their rebukes and

challenges should be listened to, as from someone appointed by the church to “keep watch over your souls.” (Hebrews 13:7)

Right of appeal. The authority of Session is not absolute; decisions of Session may be appealed to Presbytery. If you know of a decision by Session that you feel strongly is wrong, you have the right to write to our local Presbytery to request them to review it. (Contact info can be found on the website of the Pittsburgh Presbytery.) You should do this as soon as you can, because there are time limits to how long you can wait before contacting Presbytery (typically about a month).

2. Deacons

The Diaconate board is comprised of the *deacons* as well as any direct appointees (called *deacon's assistants*) that the Session wishes to add, who do not have a vote. Deacons must be men who meet the biblical criteria given in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and Acts 6:3. Deacons are not paid for their office, although they are allowed to be paid staff of the church. They are nominated by any members of the church and are trained and examined by the Session in the areas of Bible knowledge, theological knowledge, and personal Christian experience, after which they are voted on by the membership. They are *ordained* to their office by laying on of hands in a manner similar to elders. They normally serve a three-year term, after which they can be re-elected any number of times.

Direct responsibilities of deacons include:

- direct aid to people in need, with priority first on church members, then those closely connected to the church, and then, as much as possible, those in our community in need. The deacons have their own budget, which members may donate to directly, for direct aid to help the poor and those in crisis.
- counting the offerings of the church (members of Session do not know what anyone gives to the church, so that their advice to individuals is not affected by conflict of interest)
- oversight of the church property including building and equipment
- organizing setup and tear-down crews for events at rental facilities
- organizing activities to encourage and enable the whole church to participate in helping those in need and helping with the physical upkeep of the building
- financial and life-skills discipleship; teaching financial responsibility and aiding those who have a hard time functioning in society
- creating plans for the safety of the church including crisis situations and educating the church about these plans
- being proactive to be aware of church members who may be in financial crisis or other physical needs and to come alongside those members.

Deacon's authority is not just organizational, but spiritual. Their spiritual authority is primarily *discipling* authority. Deacons talking with individual members do not give commands, but their advice should be treated with respect and their rebukes and challenges should be listened to, as from someone appointed by the church to listen to confidential and private matters of finances and home life, and to give advice with biblical wisdom.

Decisions of the Diaconate board may be appealed to Session, which has the right to overrule diaconate decisions, although it rarely does so. The Session and the Diaconate meet together at least once per year.

3. Women's Ministry Council

The women's ministry council is our name for the women the apostle Paul calls the "elder women" (Titus 2:3-5) or "the list of women" (1 Timothy 5:9-10). They must be women who meet the criteria of these passages. They are nominated by any members of the church and are trained and examined by the Session in the areas of Bible knowledge, theological knowledge, and personal Christian experience, after which they are voted on by the women members of the church. They are then *installed* to their position on the council, without laying on of hands, as helpmates or "co-laborers" (Philippians 4:3) of the elders and deacons. They normally serve a three-year term, after which they can be re-elected any number of times.

Direct responsibilities of the women's ministry council include

- giving advice to Session on matters of policy and significant decisions, when asked for input,
- working alongside the Diaconate on help to those in need (this includes the meals ministry, fundraising for various ministries such as the pregnancy help center, and working with deacons to help individual women in crisis)
- being involved in church discipline cases of Session involving women either accused of sin or victims of sin
- overseeing the women's discipleship program, which includes the women's mentoring program and various women's Bible studies (the paid staff for women's discipleship report to the women's ministry council), and various retreats, social fellowship events, and trips to conferences
- directly organizing teaching events on special topics for women
- being aware of how women members are doing and being proactive to identify possible women in crisis and to come alongside those women.

Decisions of the women's ministry council may be appealed to Session, which has the right to overrule their decisions, although it rarely does so. The Session and the women's ministry council meet together at least once per year.

4. Church staff

Church staff are paid by the church either full time or part time to do specific work. They are not voted on by the congregation; they are interviewed and hired directly by Session, with input from the deacons and women's ministry council, and may be dismissed by Session. Staff positions at present include the following areas:

- *Administrative staff.* Prepare worship bulletins, church mailings, maintain website, schedule use of the church building, keep the master church event schedule.

- *Financial staff.* Keep the books of the church, make payments and reimbursements.
- *Worship staff.* Train and select musicians and support volunteers (e.g. sound system and setup crew) for the music in worship; organize special worship events (such as the Good Friday service) and special worship education events for the members of the church
- *Women's discipleship staff.* Set up mentoring networks, meet with individual women for discipleship and/or crisis situations, oversee women's Bible studies, work with women's ministry council on special educational events for women
- *Children's ministry staff.* Oversee and arrange schedules for volunteers in the nurseries and children's education classes. This may include a youth staff member specifically for teens.
- *Diaconate staff.* Maintain and clean the church building. Also, at times our church has employed staff to directly do diaconate ministry in cooperation with another organization, such as Bethany Baptist.

College ministry staff (RUF, CCO, InterVarsity, etc.) are not staff of our church but instead are direct employees of those parachurch organizations. RUF staff are employees of our Presbytery reporting to the RUF pastor.

Many of the church staff meet weekly with the pastoral staff, and report their activities to Session. A committee for staff relations, which includes a pastor, acts as a channel for communications between staff and Session.

5. Committees

Committees are directly appointed by the Session, the Women's Ministry Council, or the Deacons, and may be dismissed by them. They are all volunteers, although these committees may also have joint meetings with staff members in their areas. They report directly to Session and all of their decisions are subject to Session approval or veto. These committees usually have a representative from Session as a member. Committee chairs not given examinations by Session but sign a short statement of agreement with the major beliefs and principles of the church.

At present our committees include the following:

- *Financial committee.* Oversee banking and investments of the church finances and the auditing of the books, make recommendations to Session on financial matters, budget, and major financial decisions, issue receipts for donations.
- *Missions committee.* Make recommendations to Session for budget direct support of missionaries and parachurch staff, stay in touch with our supported missionaries to encourage them, schedule speaking opportunities for missionaries to educate the church.
- *Welcome and activity committee.* Organize special events (such as Thanksgiving dinner and picnics), schedule volunteers for the welcome table at worship services, and organize other ways of connecting people in the church socially. Directly overseen by one of the pastoral staff.
- *Men's discipleship committee.* Oversee the men's mentoring program, various men's Bible studies, various retreats, social fellowship events, and trips to conferences

- *Children's education committee.* Work with the children's education staff to organize and set policy for nurseries, education, special events, and youth groups up through high school.
- *Worship committee.* Decide on worship policy and any changes; report recommendations to Session.
- *Building committee.* Overseen by the deacons, this committee addresses planning for improvements and upkeep of the Greenfield building.
- *Special committees.* At various times Session may set up temporary committees such as search committees for staff, committees to make recommendations on specific topics such as change of the terms of employment for pastors or major property purchases, or committees to study specific ethical issues.

Any member of the church may volunteer to be on a committee by contacting a member of that committee or a Session member. The church generally welcomes volunteers on these committees, subject to Session approval.

6. Community Group leadership

Community groups (CG's) consist of groups of anywhere from 5-20 people, who meet weekly to monthly. They are meant to be "microcosms of the church" which have focus on prayer, Bible study, fellowship, and volunteering in service. Community groups have the following leadership:

- *Community group leader.* The leader of a CG is a man directly appointed by Session and is trained by and reports regularly to one of the pastoral staff. He normally "emceeds" the CG meetings, though not always; some groups have rotating discussion moderators. CG leaders are sometimes called "elder delegates" as they have a "pastoral" role in being aware of how members are doing and identifying if members are in crisis or need help from the Session or Diaconate.
- *Women's liaison.* This is a woman who is appointed by the women's ministry council and who is trained by and reports to the women's discipleship staff. She assists and advises the CG leader and aims to be aware of how women members are doing, identifying if members are in crisis or need help from the women's ministry council.
- *Assistant leader.* This is a man also directly appointed by Session who is viewed as a CG leader in training and does many of the same things as the leader.

All of the CG leadership also act as conduits of communication for members to communicate with the Session, Diaconate, and women's ministry council about any concerns they may have.

CG leadership are not given examinations by Session but sign a short statement of agreement with the major beliefs and principles of the church.

Some community groups are led directly by members of Session or by deacons. Those which are not are expected to use Bible study materials approved by Session.

Some members of the church may also attend private Bible studies not overseen by the church. We do not discourage this, but these groups are not advertised in our bulletin or on the website, and are not ministries of our church as such.

7. Overall philosophy of ministry of leadership

The Bible teaches that all Christians are equipped with spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit (I Cor 12) and some are specifically for functioning in leadership capacities. Church leaders are themselves viewed as gifts given to the church “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). With this in mind, our process of raising up leaders includes both receiving leaders that come to us as God sends them from other churches, and training and developing new leaders. We recognize that ministry training involves both a knowledge component (particularly, “theology”) as well as practical experience caring for people.

Our church generally does not have a “pipeline” by which people are automatically moved into leadership based on certifications or classes. We seek to identify people who have gifts of leadership as we see them encouraging others and volunteering in daily church life. We do not expect that all members will have those gifts or will want to be in leadership.

Some of the things Session looks for in leaders are

- regular participation in the life of the church, including worship services and community groups
- volunteering in existing opportunities
- a spirit of humility (Matthew 20:20-28, 23:11-12), not demanding or needing a title in order to serve others
- recommendations by others who see leadership gifts
- basic knowledge of the Bible and general agreement with our church’s teachings.