

First Family Church

Elder

Development

Equipping Aspiring Men



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

For all the qualifications applied by the Apostle Paul to the office of elder (1 Tim. 3:1-13), the 1st and arguably most overlooked on his list is *aspiration*, or *desire*: “The saying is trustworthy: If anyone *aspires* to the office of overseer, he *desires* a noble task” (v. 1).

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 FFC Elder Development Program aims to guide qualified elder candidates from assessment to affirmation and ordination with a focus on confessional study and pastoral training. Designed for working men with families, approved men may begin the program at any time. A typical candidate can expect the five-stage process to take 18–24 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 particular circumstances and needs.

Program Overview

Completion Time	Emphasis
18-24 months	Candidate assessment; Personal study; Ministry participation; Doctrinal examination: Congregational affirmation

We affirm of course that no man-made program 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 program to create a clear path to equip aspiring men and to affirm those whom He has gifted for elder ministry. May our Lord bless his churches with many such gifts!

STAGE 1: ASPIRATION

INTRODUCTION

The goal of this initial stage is to *discreetly* identify men in FFC who aspire 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.

Completion Time	Emphasis
2-4 months	Candidate assessment; Preparation

THE PROCESS

Ideally, a man will complete following steps **within 4 months** of submitting his application (check each box upon completion):

- Step 1: Complete the [“Aspiring Elder Questionnaire”](#)
- Step 2: Take the [“Scripture Knowledge Test”](#)
- Step 3: Complete the [“Aspiring Elder’s Wife Questionnaire”](#) (candidate’s wife)
- Step 4: Meet with the current pastor(s) to discuss steps 1–3.
- Step 5: Complete the preparatory reading and writing (see below)
- Step 6: Elder Board evaluation (see below)

PREPARATORY READING & WRITING

The aspiring brother will read the following books and write a 4–5 page (double spaced) reaction paper for each. Each reaction paper will be emailed directly to the FFC elders as they are completed.

- ❖ Church Elders by Jeramie Rinne
- ❖ The Shepherd Leader at Home by Timothy Z. Witmer
- ❖ Dangerous Calling by Paul Tripp

Depending on how the man performs on his Scripture Knowledge Test, additional time and study may be required for improving his biblical literacy before proceeding to the next stage.

ELDER BOARD EVALUATION

After an aspiring man completes Steps 1–5 (above), the elders will evaluate the submitted papers during a monthly elders meeting. This discussion will include an initial evaluation of the man’s character, maturity, knowledge, and home life. A majority of the elders must agree that the man is basically qualified to begin “Stage 2: Education” and begin his public preparation as a prospective elder.

STAGE 2: EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

Upon approval from the board of elders for advancement, the aspiring man will begin the educational stage of his process. The goals of this second stage—the most substantial of the five – is to:

- 1) Make the candidate’s aspirations public to the congregation.
- 2) Develop and evaluate his pastoral and doctrinal aptitude.

Regarding the latter goal, two complimentary parts are included: *personal study* and *observation*. Men who complete this stage may be eligible for congregational affirmation as a “gifted brother” (2LCF 26:11) and advancement to “Stage 3: Participation,” pending approval from the board of elders.

Completion Time	Emphasis
18 months or less	Focused study; Ministry observation

PART 1–PERSONAL STUDY

A prospective elder’s study consists of side-by-side tracks: *pastoral* and *confessional*. A man will work on both tracks at the same time. Whereas the *pastoral* track has an assigned schedule, the *confessional* track is self-paced, as shown below:

Overview of Stage 2 Study Tracks

	Pastoral	Confessional
Completion Time	9 months or less	18 months or less
Study Schedule	Assigned	Self-paced

Discussions	Monthly	Quarterly
Completion	Before Advancing to Stage 3	Before Advancing to Stage 4

PASTORAL TRACK (9 months)

The pastoral study track provides an introduction to 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 9 months* to complete the track.¹

An aspiring man will typically read the assigned material per month then write a 3-5 page (double spaced) reaction paper prior to meeting with a designated elder for discussion. Candidates must complete the entire pastoral track before the board of elders will consider advancing him to “Stage 3: Participation.”

Month	Assigned Reading
1	<input type="checkbox"/> The Christian Ministry by Charles Bridges pt. 1 & 2
2	<input type="checkbox"/> The Christian Ministry by Charles Bridges pt. 3 & 5
3	<input type="checkbox"/> The Christian Ministry by Charles Bridges pt. 4
4	<input type="checkbox"/> The Lord’s Supper as a Mean’s of Grace by Richard Barcelos <input type="checkbox"/> Why Johnny Can’t Preach by T. David Gordon
5	<input type="checkbox"/> 40 Questions about Elders and Deacons by Benjamin Merkle (pg. 21-223)
6	<input type="checkbox"/> The Glory of a True Church by Benjamin Keach <input type="checkbox"/> A Reformed Baptist Manifesto by Waldren and Barcellos
7	<input type="checkbox"/> Pastors and Their Critics by Beeke and Thompson
8	<input type="checkbox"/> Enjoy Your Prayer Life by Michael Reeves <input type="checkbox"/> A Defense of Confessionalism by Arden Hodgins Jr <input type="checkbox"/> Associational Churchmanship by James Renihan
9	<input type="checkbox"/> Pulpit Aflame (various authors)

¹ The length or study of this track may be lengthened due to the providence of God.

CONFESSIONAL TRACK (Self-paced up to 18-months)

Every qualified elder must be able to teach sound doctrine and refute error (1 Tim 3:2; Tit. 1:9). Thus, every FFC elder must strictly subscribe to the Second London Confession (1689) as our church's doctrinal standard. To this end, the Confessional track guides the aspiring man through a self-paced comprehensive study of every chapter in the Confession with the expectation that he will take *no more than eighteen months* to complete his work. Unlike the Pastoral Track, completion of this track is not required for advancement to "Stage 3: Participation" but is required for "Stage 4: Examination."

The assignments for the Confessional track include assigned reading (see below) and writing. Regarding the latter, the aspiring man will create teaching notes for every chapter of the confession using the [provided 2LCF outlines as a template](#) and meet quarterly with the elders to discuss his progress. The reading for this track is as follows:

Primary Texts (primary study in every chapter of the Confession)

- ❖ *1689 Second London Confession and Baptist Catechism.*
- ❖ *To the Judicious and Impartial Reader: An Exposition of the 1689 Second London Confession of Faith* by James M. Renihan
- ❖ *Systematic Theology* by Louis Berkhof (*selected chapters pertinent to the confession*)

Supplemental Texts (additional study on confessionalism, Baptist covenant theology, and the harmony of law and gospel)

- Crisis of Confidence* by Carl R. Trueman
- The Mystery of Christ, His Covenant, and His Kingdom* by Samuel D. Renihan
- The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology (Revised)* by Pascal Denault
- The Law and the Gospel* by Earnest C. Resinger
- A Treatise on Law and Gospel* by John Colquhoun
- Getting the Garden Right* by Richard Barcellos

PART 2—OBSERVATION

This second part of Stage 2 aims to couple the candidate'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 as his schedule permits and Tuesday morning meetings if able.

ELDER BOARD EVALUATION

After an aspiring man completes the Pastoral track and shows sufficient progress in the Confessional track, he will be evaluated by the FFC Elders during the nearest elder meeting. His evaluation is focused on his personal character, theological and pastoral aptitude, and philosophical agreement with the elders. A majority of the elder board must agree that the candidate is qualified for advancement to “Stage 3: Participation” or possible recommendation to the FFC congregation as a “gifted brother” (2LCF 26.11).

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 *nine months or less*, two primary responsibilities fall to the candidate during this stage:

- 1) *Participating* in FFC elder ministry and
- 2) *finishing* the confessional track.

Completion Time	Emphasis
6-9 months or less	Focused study; Ministry observation

PARTICIPATING IN ELDER MINISTRY

Elder Meetings.

Having been approved for advancement to this stage by the elder board upon his completion of the Pastoral track in Stage 2, the aspiring man, like-minded with the FFC Elder ministry philosophy, is now called upon to participate with wisdom in the meetings. In the previous stage, he merely observed the monthly meetings. In this stage, he will *participate* in elder meetings as a non-voting member.

Pastoral Visitations.

The candidate will join another elder once per month and take notes of the meeting. Lord willing, from the beginning to end of this stage, the candidate 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 at the midweek service and Sunday school, leading the Lord’s Day assemblies, and preaching at least one Lord’s Day sermon.

FINALIZING THE CONFESSIONAL TRACK

The candidate began the confessional track during “Stage 2” with the expectation that he will complete the track in *no less than 18 months*. While he was permitted to advance to this stage prior to its completion, the brother may not advance to “Stage 4: Examination” until he is finished. For more information on the Confessional track, see “Confessional Track” under the heading “Personal Study” in the previous stage.

ELDER BOARD EVALUATION

After an aspiring man completes the Confessional track and sufficiently participates in regular elder ministry, he will be evaluated by the FFC Elders during the next available elder meeting. His evaluation is focused on his theological convictions, possible confessional scruples or exceptions, pastoral giftedness, and personal chemistry with the sitting elder board. Whereas a candidate’s advancement to the second and third stages required only a majority vote from the elder board, 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 FFC's elder ministry. The aim of this stage is to comprehensively examine a candidate's home, pastoral gifting, and confessional subscription, with a view toward nominating the qualified man for the office of elder.

Completion Time	Emphasis
1-2 Months	Doctrinal Examination; Nomination

PRIVATE EXAMINATION: THE MAN'S HOME

The program began with both the candidate and his wife completing questionnaires that included inquiries into their home and the man's readiness for elder ministry. It ends with a capstone interview for the aspiring couple with the current elders of the church. Areas of interest include, but are not limited to:

- ❖ How have the candidate and his wife managed the added pressure and commitment of the program, 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?
- ❖ 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 have begun the program?
- ❖ In what ways might the candidate's wife require special care and encouragement from either the church or the elder board if her husband is affirmed as an elder?

PUBLIC EXAMINATION: THE MAN'S MINISTRY

After a private examination of the candidate and his wife, the aspiring man will be publicly examined before the FFC 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 candidate’s public examination focuses on his pastoral gifting. During a Q&A before attending FFC 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:

- ❖ The Lord’s Day ministry
- ❖ Caring for the flock of God
- ❖ Navigating church discipline
- ❖ Evaluating prospective members
- ❖ The goals for pastoral visitation
- ❖ Enduring criticism and discouragement
- ❖ His personal desires for the future of FFC

PART 2—EXAMINING HIS CONFSSIONAL SUBSCRIPTION

In addition to his pastoral gifting, the candidate must demonstrate a strict subscription to the 1689 Second London 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 FFC members, the candidate will answer questions including but not limited to the following topics:

- ❖ Can he publicly affirm a full subscription to the 2LCF.
- ❖ Explaining and applying key doctrines in the Confession (based off his notes in the outline).

PUBLIC NOMINATION

Following the candidate’s examination, he may be publicly nominated for the office of elder at the next FFC member’s meeting, pending unanimous approval from the board of elders and in accordance with the FFC Constitution & By Laws.

STAGE 5: AFFIRMATION

SUMMARY

After a candidate is publicly nominated (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 board's nomination at the next duly called member's meeting in accordance with our Constitution & By Laws,

Upon receiving the required affirmative votes from the members, the newly elected elder will immediately begin serving in that office, and formally recognized as such. At the next Lord's Day gathering, the current elder board will lay hands on the man after he [makes his public vows of office](#).