

21st Century Shepherds

Five Roles for Ruling Elders





Martin Bucer
1491-1551



Samuel Miller
1769-1850

Moses
1592-1472



Then the LORD said to Moses, “Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. And I will come down and talk with you there. And I will take some of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, so that you may not bear it yourself alone.”

Numbers 11:16-17



Committing the whole government of the Church to the hands of the pastors alone, may be affirmed to carry in it some of the worst seeds of Popery; which, though under the administration of good men, they may not at once, lead to palpable mischief, will seldom fail in producing, in the end, the most serious evils, both to those who govern, and those who obey.

Samuel Miller

He (the pastor) cannot be everywhere, and know every thing. He cannot perform what is expected from him, and at the same time so watch over his whole flock as to fulfill every duty which the church demands.

He must “give himself to reading;” he must prepare for the services of the pulpit; he must discharge his various public labours; he must employ much time in private, in instructing and counseling those who apply to him for instruction and advice; and he must act his part in the concerns of the whole Church with which he is connected...We might as well expect and demand any impossibility.

Samuel Miller

1. Counsel, Support, and Defend the Pastor

It is deplorable, when a minister is assailed for his fidelity, by the profane or the worldly, if any portion of the Eldership, either take part against him or shrink from his active and determined defence.



And as members of the Church session, whether assembled in their judicial capacity or not as the Pastor's counselors and colleagues, in all matters relating to the spiritual rule of the Church; so it is their official duty to encourage, sustain, and defend him, in the faithful discharge of his duty.



It is not meant, of course, that they are to consider themselves as bound to sustain him in every thing he may say or do, whether right or wrong; but that, when they believe him to be faithful, both to truth and duty, they should feel it to be their duty to stand by him, to shield him from the arrows of the wicket, and to encourage him, as far as he obeys Christ.

—Samuel Miller



We know that ministers are subject to the same frailties and imperfections of other men. We know, too, that a love of pre-eminence and of power is not only natural to them, in common with others; but that this principle, very early after the days of the Apostles, began to manifest itself as the reigning sin of ecclesiastics, and produced, first Prelacy, and afterwards Popery, which as so long and so ignobly enslaved the Church of Christ. Is it wise or safe to constitute one man as a despot over a whole Church?

Samuel Miller

2. Practice Routine & Extraordinary Discipline

“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

1 Peter 5:1-3



Without wholesome discipline for removing offences and excluding the corrupt and the profane, there may be an assembly; but there cannot be a Church.

Samuel Miller

Bucer' s Five Tasks of the Shepherd

1. To lead to Christ our Lord and into his communion those who are still estranged from him, whether through carnal excess or false worship.
2. To restore those who had once been brought to Christ and into his church but have been drawn away again through the affairs of the flesh or false doctrine.
3. To assist in the true reformation of those who while remaining in the church of Christ have grievously fallen and sinned.

Five Tasks of the Shepherd, cont.

4. To re-establish in true Christian strength and health those who, while persevering in the fellowship of Christ and not doing anything particularly or grossly wrong, have become somewhat feeble and sick in the Christian life.
5. To protect from all offence and falling away and continually encourage in all good things those who stay with the flock and in Christ' sheep-pen without grievously sinning or becoming weak and sick in their Christian walk.

It is their duty to have an eye of inspection and care over all the members of the congregation and for this purpose to cultivate a universal and intimate acquaintance, as far as may be, with every family in the flock of which they are made “overseers.” They are bound to watch over the children and youth, and especially baptized children, with paternal vigilance, recognizing and affectionately addressing them on all proper occasions; giving them, and their parents, in reference to them, seasonable counsel, and putting in the Lord’s claim to their hearts and lives, as children of the Church.

It is their duty to attend to the case of those who are serious, and disposed to inquire concerning their eternal interests; to converse with them, and, from time to time, to give information concerning them to the Pastor. It is their duty to take notice of, and admonish, in private those who appear to be growing careless, or falling into habits in any respect criminal, suspicious or unpromising. It is their duty to visit and pray with the sick, as far as their circumstances admit, and to request the attendance of the Pastor on the sick, and the dying, when it may be seasonable or desired.

It is incumbent on them to assist the Pastor for maintaining meetings for social prayer, to take part in conducting devotional exercises in those meetings; to preside in them when the Pastor is absent; and, if they are endowed with suitable gifts, under his direction, occasionally to drop a word of instruction and exhortation to the people in those social meetings. If the officers of the Church neglect these meetings, (the importance of which cannot be estimated), there is every reason to apprehend that they will not be duly honoured or attended by the body of the people.

It is the duty of Ruling Elders, also, to visit the members of the Church and their families, with the Pastor, if he request it; without him, if he does not; to converse with them; to instruct the ignorant; to confirm the wavering; to encourage the timid, and to excite and animate all classes to a faithful and exemplary discharge of duty.

Samuel Miller

3. Empower Other Leaders

Now in these days, as the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose by the Greek-speaking Jews against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the twelve summoned the community of disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we neglect the word of God to serve tables. So, brothers, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom we will put in charge of this need. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And the statement pleased the whole group...

Acts 5:1-6

An attentive and impartial perusal of the record of this first institution of Deacons, must convince any one, that preaching, baptizing or partaking in the spiritual rule and government of the Church, were so far from being embraced in the original destination of the New Testament Deacon, that they were absolutely precluded, by the very terms, and the whole spirit of the representation given by the inspired historian.

Samuel Miller

“The jurisdiction of the deacons is not over persons, but only over things; it does not appertain to the government of the church or the cure of souls, but to the care of ecclesiastical goods and tables...”

—-Book of Church Order of the Presbyterian Church in the United States,
1867

Leaders that Elders Can Empower

- Deacons
- Trustees
- Teachers
- Small Group Leaders
- Staff

4. Resolve Disputes

And you will select from all the people men of ability, fearers of God, trustworthy men, haters of dishonest gain, and you will appoint such men over them as commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, and commanders of tens. And let them judge the people all the time, and every major issue they will bring to you, and every minor issue they will judge themselves. And so lighten it for yourself, and they will bear it with you. If you will do this thing and God will command you, then you will be able to endure, and also each of the people will go to his home in peace.” And Moses listened to the voice of his father-in-law, and he did all that he had said. And Moses chose men of ability from all Israel, and he appointed them as heads over the people, as commanders of thousands, commanders of hundreds, commanders of fifties, and commanders of tens. And they judged the people all the time; the difficult issues they would bring to Moses, and every minor issue they would judge themselves.

Exodus 18:21-26

“Mary, Mary Maybe Not Quite So Contrary”

First Presbyterian Church, New York, NY

1808



“...of the opinion that she has not paid strict regard to truth which she ought to have done and for this she receives a caution from the moderator.”

--Minutes of the Session of the First Presbyterian Church of New York, November 21, 1808.



Where Can Elders Resolve Disputes?

- Exit interviews and follow up with people leaving congregation
- Staff disputes
- Critics of the pastor and staff
- Proactively shepherd new members

5. Fervent Prayer and Intercession

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working...

James 5:13-16

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Were the foregoing views of the nature and duties of the Elder's office generally adopted, duly appreciated, and faithfully carried out into practice, what a mighty change would be effected in our Zion! With what a different estimate of the obligations and responsibilities which rest upon them, would the candidates for this office enter on their sacred work! And with what different feelings would the mass of the people, and especially all who love the cause of Christ, regard these spiritual Counselors and Guides, in their daily walks, and particularly in their friendly and official visits!

Elder Prayer Tactics

- Prayer Walks/ Prayer Drives
- Healing Prayer Services
- Daily Prayer led by Elders
- Intercessory Prayer at Beginning of Session Meeting
- Inviting them to pray with pastors and staff during Church crises
- Asking trusted Elders to pray with and for you

Where are we?

And how do we get there?



This is change most devoutly to be desired. The interests of the Church are more involved in the prevalence of just opinions and practice in reference to this office, than almost any other that can be named. Were every congregation, besides a wise, pious and faithful pastor, furnished with eight or ten Elders to co-operate with him in all his parochial labors, on the plan which has been sketched; men of wisdom, faith, prayer, and Christian activity; men willing to deny and exert themselves for the welfare of Zion;

men alive to the importance of every thing that relates to the orthodoxy, purity, order and spirituality of the Church, and ever on the watch for the opportunities of doing good; men, in a word, willing to “take the oversight” of the flock of the Lord, and to labor without ceasing for the promotion of its best interest: were every Church furnished with such a body of Elders—can any one doubt that knowledge, order, piety and a growth in grace as well as in numbers, would be as common in our Churches, as the reverse is now the prevailing state of things, in consequence of the want of fidelity on the part of those who are nominally the overseers and guides of the flock?

Samuel Miller

Five Things Pastors Can Do to Foster Shepherding

- 1. Focus on training our own heart, mind and soul on teaching**
- 2. Cultivate the presence of the Holy Spirit among the elders, including non-active elders**
- 3. Foster the “discipline of life and manners” through a clear mission, vision and core practices.**
- 4. Create Opportunities for Elders to Teach**
- 5. Share the Reins of Leadership**