

Pastoral Qualifications

Trinity Baptist Church, Calgary, Alberta

Trinity Baptist Church holds that two distinct offices within the local church are delineated in Scripture, “elder” and “deacon”, and that there is evidence that multiple believers operated within both roles. In a plurality of elders, some are recognized as the chief teachers, commonly referred to as “pastors”. These offices are not intended to reflect a hierarchy; all Christians are on level ground before Christ, the Head of the church.

As Trinity Baptist Church seeks a pastor to serve as a financially supported staff member and full-time elder, we have decided to use the biblical qualifications of that office as our primary guide for determining mandatory requirements.

Qualifications of elder-overseer-shepherd

There are three words in Scripture used to describe the same office: elder (*presbuteros*), overseer (*episkopos*), and shepherd (*poimen*). Qualifications for this office can be found in Titus 1:5-9, 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and 1 Peter 5:1-5.¹

Scripture	Qualification	Explanation
Titus 1:6	blameless	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> above reproach, not open to censure, having unimpeachable integrity, that cannot be called into to account, unreprouvable, unaccused
	husband of one wife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a one-wife kind of man, not a philanderer (doesn't necessarily rule out widowers); not guilty of immorality or polygamy
	having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> children are Christians, not incorrigible or unruly, having a family well-governed and well-trained in religion, not given to excess, not insubordinate
Titus 1:7	blameless, as the steward of God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> stewardship involves entrusted management of the owner's affairs, including the dealing of proper portions to every servant and children not yet of age; one against whom no accusation could lie
	not self-willed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not one who is imperious or dogmatical or impatient of contradiction, nor unyielding; not arrogantly self-satisfied, self-pleasing or assuming
	not soon angry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not prone to anger or irascible
	not given to wine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not overly fond of wine or drunken; not one who is in the habit of drinking wine; not one who sits long at (or beside) his wine
	no striker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not pugnacious or contentious or quarrelsome; no bruiser or person ready for a blow
	not given to filthy lucre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not eager for base or shameful gain, not greedy for money; not covetous
Titus 1:8	lover of hospitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a friend of strangers; generous to guests; a real devotion to the welfare of others
	lover of good men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> could mean loving “goodness” or “good men”; should love every good object and be ready to promote it; should love every good man
	sober	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a man of sound mind, sensible, self-controlled, temperate, sane; one who is under the control of reason (not passion); having his desires and passions well regulated
	just	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> righteous, upright, aligned with right; him whose way of thinking, feeling, and acting is wholly conformed to the will of God; rendering to each his due and that in a judicial sense, passing judgement on others, whether expressed in words or shown by the manner of dealing with them
	holy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> undefiled by sin, free from wickedness; religiously observing every moral obligation; pure, pious; devout, responsible in fulfilling moral obligations to God and man
	temperate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> controlling, mastering, curbing or restraining one's self; restrained, under control; stronger and more deliberate effort at self-control than implied by “sober”
Titus 1:9	holding fast the faithful word	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> committed to God's Word as authoritative; cleave to the true message; cling to the truth even in face of opposition
	as he hath been taught	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> understands doctrine or the body of Christian teaching
	able by sound doctrine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> calling others to wholeness through teaching God's Word

¹ Note: For reference purposes only, the English word or phrase used to identify each qualification is taken from the KJV. Other translations vary the wording but each meaning should coincide with the explanation given herein.

	to exhort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaching in a way that calls to one's side or to entreat, admonish, beseech, strive, comfort, encourage, strengthen, console; to teach in a method where men know the truth but need encouragement to follow it
	to convince	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teaching in a way that refutes, corrects, convicts, exposes, admonishes, reproves, chastens, or severely reprehends falsehood; convincing those who speak against the truth; able to refute objections; to teach in a method where men are ignorant or opposed to the truth
1 Tim. 3:2	vigilant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> sober, temperate, abstaining from wine, either entirely or from its immoderate use
	of good behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> modest, well arranged, seemly
	apt to teach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> competent or skillful in teaching; an ability and love of teaching
1 Tim. 3:3	patient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> seemingly, suitable, fair, gentle, mild, equitable; not insisting on his own rights; kindly, forbearing, gracious, considerate, magnanimous, genial
	not a brawler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> abstaining from fighting; not contentious
1 Tim. 3:4	ruleth well his own house	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> acts as a superintendent, protector, guardian, sustainer, caregiver over his household
	children in subjection with all gravity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a father exhibiting character that entitles him to reverence and dignity; his deportment should be such as to inspire others with respect for him
1 Tim. 3:6	not a novice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not a new convert nor someone that has recently become a Christian; specifically a warning against pride ("wrap in a mist", blind conceit, beclouded)
1 Tim. 3:7	good report of them which are without	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> excellent, genuine, beautiful (by reason of purity of heart and life), and praiseworthy witness or testimony among non-Christians; well thought of by outsiders
1 Pet. 5:2	not by constraint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not serving against his will
1 Pet. 5:3	neither as being lords over God's heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not dominating in his area of ministry (a shepherd is to lead, not drive the flock)
	being examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a pleasure to follow because of his Christian example

These qualifications all refer to observable behaviors, actions, or lifestyle traits that are to be present or clearly demonstrated in a candidate's life – not requiring the exercise of extraordinary spiritual insight and discernment of men's motives and intentions. They represent external evidence that can reveal internal reality. Further, to identify such external evidence, one must have some first-hand knowledge of candidates or communication with those who do.

These qualifications do not imply earthly "perfection" or "sinlessness" but largely represent an achievable lifestyle, despite our continued struggle against the flesh. Though such a person may occasionally "miss the mark" with respect to the behaviors, it is expected that such is the exception rather than the rule of their lives. 1 Tim. 3:1 indicates that we all should be striving for these same behaviors in our own lives; nevertheless, this verse also indirectly conveys the understanding that not everyone will qualify.

In general, elders are to be exemplary in spiritual, family, church, and social life. The marks of spiritual maturity include (but are not limited to) godly stewardship of resources, worthy of respect, supporter of the commission and ministry of the church, integrity, disposition of a servant, able and ready to teach deep truths of God's Word, and careful speech and action.

At Trinity Baptist Church, elders must agree with our doctrinal positions as stated in our Constitution and other documents. Further, within our local church, the office of elder is restricted to men whose faith and teaching ministry are mature and approved. They may be single or married (or widowed) where neither spouse is divorced.

We struggle with contemporary society's view that these qualifications represent unfair restrictions or lack equal opportunity for all persons; that view maintains everyone has the right to hold such office. In contrast, the biblical view expressed in Acts 20:28 indicates that persons holding such offices are chosen and prepared by God (Holy Spirit); human rights are not involved. God also chooses "evangelists", "pastors" and "teachers" as pertaining to spiritual gifting (Eph. 4:7, 11). It cannot and does not take away any believer's equality of standing before God (Gal. 3:28).

As pertaining to gifting, note that the list of qualifications does not identify specific spiritual gifts. Someone with the gift of hospitality may be a "lover of hospitality" but that characteristic may be equally true of those without the supernaturally-enabled gift. So, when we observe persons gifted as "evangelists", "pastors" and "teachers", their gifting does not automatically qualify them to serve in the office of elder-overseer-shepherd. Those with such spiritual gifts are to use them for God's glory and for the edification of the local body of believers – whether or not they hold the office.