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Working Together With God's Stewards

1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-18

Introduction

1. This congregation has a long history.
2. As I shared with you in our bulletin from this past week, the recorded history of this congregation goes back to 1889.
3. That year Mrs. Mattie Hillman Ewin, the widow of Captain W. G. Ewin, moved from Hurricane Mills to Waverly with her three daughters Susie, Grace and Winia.
4. Some months later, Sunday, June 22, 1890 the Christians who composed the Waverly congregation met together for their first service in their new building on Church Street for the first time — twenty-five were present.
5. David Nowlin shared with me this past week that the first elders for this congregation were recognized on October 5th of that year.
6. Sixty-three years later, the congregation moved from the building on Church Street to this building in which we are worshiping today.
7. You and I can only imagine the number of souls who have come to Christ over the years since those brethren first met here in Waverly over 134 years ago.
8. During all those years, God has blessed this congregation to be led by a host of godly elders.
9. Today, our present elders Keith Carnahan, Larry Hayes, Ronnie Moore, David Nowlin and George Palmer will be joined by three more men which you as a congregation have put forth as men qualified to serve in this office.
10. The majority of us know these men and have worked alongside of them for years.
11. They are Robert Martin, Dan Schofield and Edward Toland.

12. Following our worship this morning, our present Elders will formerly recognize them as a part of our eldership.
13. This past November and early December, in preparation for this day, we looked at what God says about the heart of a shepherd, what God requires of these men and our responsibility toward them.
14. In preparation for their installation, I would like for us to begin by looking at . . .

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I. The Pattern of the New Testament: A Plurality of Elders

A. JERUSALEM AND JUDEA (ACTS 11:30; 15:2)

1. The first time we read of elders in the church was when the brethren at Antioch sent a contribution for relief of the Christians living in Judea to the elders of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:30).

“And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.” (Acts 11:30, NASB95)

2. We encounter these men again in Acts 15:4, when Paul and Barnabas meet with them and the apostles to resolve some matters concerning the conversion of the Gentiles.

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B. DERBE, LYSTRA, ICONIUM AND ANTIOCH (ACTS 14:23)

1. On their first missionary journey in Asia Minor, Paul and Barnabas were privileged to baptize a number of people into Christ in the cities of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Antioch.
2. On their way back home, they stopped at each of these new congregations encouraging these new disciples to “continue in the faith” (Acts 14:22).
3. Luke tells us in the next verse, (23), “they . . . appointed elders for them in every church.”

Slide 4**C. EPHESUS (ACTS 20:17)**

1. On his way back to Jerusalem following his third missionary journey, the apostle Paul stopped at the seaport of Miletus.
2. From there, he sent word "to Ephesus" and "called to him the elders of the church" (Acts 20:17).

Slide 5**D. PHILIPPI (PHILIPPIANS 1:1)**

1. During his imprisonment in Rome, Paul sent a letter to the church in Philippi, "to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons" (Philippians 1:1b, NASB95).
2. "Overseers" is another term used in Scripture for elders.

Slide 6**E. CRETE (TITUS 1:5)**

1. In Paul's letter to Titus who was working with the churches on the island of Crete, Paul tells Titus the reason he left him in Crete — "that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you" (Titus 1:5).
2. Notice that Paul does not tell Titus to appoint one elder in each city but a multiple of elders.
3. In that day and time each city would have had a single congregation, not many as we often see today.
4. In each and every one of these congregations we see that there were a number of men appointed as elders to lead each congregation.
5. It is our goal to follow this same pattern here in this congregation.

Slide 7**II. Does God's Word Stipulate Any Installation Procedure?**

A. OLD TESTAMENT PRIESTS (EXODUS 28:40-29:41)

1. When we look back at the Old Testament and priesthood which God established to serve in the tabernacle and later the temple, we find an elaborate and detailed procedure for their installation.
2. There were special sacrifices to be offered, special washings, ceremonial garments to be worn, prescribed actions on certain days, and they were to be anointed with holy oil.
3. No one could deviate the least little bit from these prescribed laws.

7a**B. NEW TESTAMENT ELDERS**

1. In the New Testament we do not find elders being anointed like Aaron and his sons (Leviticus 8:12).
2. These men are not appointed to a special priestly office or a holy order.
3. They are assuming offices of leadership or service among God's people.
4. There is no holy ritual to perform or special ceremony to observe.
5. Appointment to the eldership is not a holy sacrament.
6. No special grace or empowerment is conferred upon these men.
7. Today, these men are assuming the office of leadership among you and I as God's people.

Slide 8**III. A Final Word To Our Shepherds****A. WORK TO KNOW YOUR SHEEP**

"I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me," (John 10:14, NASB95)

1. In the first verse of our reading this morning the apostle Paul wrote, "For the body is not one member, but many" (1 Corinthians 12:14, NASB95).
2. This congregation is made up of many members.

3. In John 10:14, Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd, and I know My own . . ."
4. He set the bar very high for each of you who serve and will serve as elders under the Chief Shepherd.
5. In 1 Corinthians 12:27, Paul wrote "Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it."
6. Let me encourage each of you men this morning: *"Get to know your flock, one sheep at a time."*
6. Spend time with them on a regular basis.
7. Know how they are doing and what their physical and spiritual needs are.

Slide 9**B. HELP YOUR SHEEP IDENTIFY WITH YOU**

1. In John 10:14, Jesus not only said, "I know My own" but also "My own know Me."
2. As shepherds of this body of Christians, help the members here identify with you.
3. Build trust with them by being a person who is authentic, a person of integrity, one who is compassionate.
4. Down through the centuries, men and women have followed great leaders because of what they saw in those leaders.
5. Set the bar high for yourself and those who will follow you in your office.
6. Remember the words of Paul to the Christians in Corinth, "Be imitators of me, just as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1, NASB95).
7. If you men keep working to imitate Christ in your lives, you can't go wrong in your leadership.
8. Do not fail to communicate your values to us and your sense of mission:
 - a. What do you hope for us to accomplish here in our community?
 - b. How can we work together to achieve those goals?

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C. ENCOURAGE YOUR SHEEP

1. As I shared with you in the beginning of this lesson, Paul and Barnabas, on their journey home from their first mission trip, went back to each of the congregations they had established.
2. Luke tells us that at each city they were "strengthening the souls of the disciples" and "encouraging them to continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22).
3. I would like to encourage each of you men who are our elders and those who will join them today to do the same.
4. Do this by keeping them well informed of what you are doing and where we are going as a congregation.
5. Make sure that each member of this body knows that he or she is important and necessary.
6. Pray for them and let them know that you are doing so.

Conclusion

1. I honestly believe if each of you men will strive to do these things, you will see this congregation grow and accomplish more than you ever thought possible.
2. Remember, you are "God's stewards" and as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:2, "it is required of stewards that they be found faithful" (ESV).
3. It is my prayer and I believe that of this entire congregation that God guide and keep you in this most important work.
4. We are all behind you and ready to follow you as you lead us heavenward.
5. Today, if you have not come to Christ in obedient faith, why not do so now.
6. Turn from your sin and confess Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.
7. Be buried with Him in baptism. He will add you to His church and write your name on the roll of the redeemed.