

# WHAT IS “PRESBYTERIANISM”?

## STRUCTURE:

Read **Ephesians 4:10-16**. Who is Head of the church?\_\_\_\_\_. How does He exercise His leadership?\_\_\_\_\_. Who are the apostles and prophets, and how do they minister to us today?\_\_\_\_\_. How about the evangelists, shepherds, and teachers?\_\_\_\_\_.

The notion that Christ is the Head of the church is the very first principle laid out in our denomination’s constitutional Book of Church Order (BCO). On the very first page, in a section entitled “The King and Head of the Church” we read, “Jesus, the Mediator, the sole Priest, Prophet, King, Saviour, and Head of the Church, contains in Himself, by way of eminency, all the offices in His Church...” adding also that Jesus is, “...the only Lawgiver in Zion”, and in the next section, “God alone is Lord of the conscience...” *Given the history of the church, what do you think is the significance of some of these word choices and phrases?*

The BCO preface goes on to say, “It belongs to His Majesty from His throne of glory to rule and teach the Church through His Word and Spirit by the ministry of men; thus mediately exercising His own authority and enforcing His own laws, unto the edification and establishment of His Kingdom.” *What do you think it means that Jesus “mediately” exercises His authority? Read Exodus 18:13-23 (c.f. Numbers 11:16). How do you see this principal at work among the people of Israel? What name is given to the appointed leaders? Can you list any New Testament examples of Elders in action? (hint: Acts) Where would you look in the New Testament to find qualifications for Elders? (hint: Pastoral Epistles)*

## REVIEW: FORMS OF GOVERNMENT

In general, there are three basic forms of church government:

	<b>Episcopalian</b> (Top down/Hierarchical)	<b>Congregational</b> (Bottom up/Egalitarian)	<b>Presbyterian</b> (Representative/Republic)
Denominational Structure:	Pyramid structure (complete denominational control)	Autonomous structure (minimal denominational involvement, if any)	Structure organized by “grass-roots” efforts (denomination shaped by the churches’ leaders)
Appointment of Leaders:	Leaders appointed, ordain, and installed by a higher body of leaders	Congregations nominate and elect leaders; credentialing may done through a denomination	Congregations nominate and elect leaders; credentialing done through next higher court
Decision Making:	Leaders make and pass down decisions for those under authority	Congregations make decisions by popular vote	Leaders make decisions on behalf of those they represent (locally, regionally, and nationally)
Strengths:			
Weaknesses:			

*Do you think any of these three forms of government necessarily contradict the principle of Christ’s Headship? What about the concept of Elders?*

## COURTS:

There are three courts in the PCA: \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

Each court is made up of Teaching Elders (TEs) and Ruling Elders (REs) from individual churches or missionary fields, gathering either locally (on behalf of their particular congregation), regionally, or nationally. **No TE or RE has any more or less authority than another in any of the three courts.** For details on the different roles of each court, see the handout, *Courts of the PCA*. Quiz: *Under what circumstances (if any) can a congregation leave the PCA? \_\_\_\_\_.* *If a church leaves or is dismissed from the PCA, who gets the building? \_\_\_\_\_.*

## OFFICES:

The two offices in any particular church are Deacon and Elder. Elders look after the spiritual needs of the church (gospel ministry, discipleship, discipline, etc...), while Deacons look after the physical needs (mercy ministries, church building upkeep, etc...).

### OFFICE OF DEACON:

**διάκονος (“diaconos”):** “one who, by virtue of the office assigned him by the church, cares for the poor and has charge of and distributes the money collected for their use” (Thayer’s Greek Lexicon)

**Biblical Warrant:** *Read Acts 6:1-6. Why did the disciples appoint Deacons? Do you get the sense from this text that serving widows was beneath the disciples? Why or why not?*

*Read 1 Timothy 3:8-13. What are some of the qualifications given here for Deacons? Why do you think these qualifications are important for Deacons in the church?*

### OFFICE OF ELDER:

**πρεσβύτερος (“presbuteros”):** Synonyms = *overseer* or *bishop*. According to Acts 20:28, Elders are called to pay careful attention to *themselves* and the flock, “in which the Holy Spirit has made [them] overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

**Biblical Warrant:** *Read 1 Timothy 3:1-7. What are some of the qualifications given here? How do they differ from Deacons? Where is their overlap? Why do you think these qualifications are important for Elders in the church?*

Titus 1:5-9 has a list of qualifications, but also describes some of the duties of the Elders. *What duties do you see there?*

## TWO OR THREE OFFICES?

### IMPORTANCE OF PARITY:

### THE FIRST “GENERAL ASSEMBLY”

# COURTS OF THE PCA

## INDIVIDUAL CHURCHES (SESSION):

**Who makes up the Session?** Teaching and Ruling Elders of a particular church.

**Roles of the Session:** (BCO 12-5)

1. The pastoral care and Christian conduct of church members under its care
2. Examine, ordain, and install Deacons and Ruling Elders elected by the church
3. Approve actions of special importance affecting church property
4. Call congregational meetings and oversee Christian education and outreach
5. Oversight of worship, sacraments, uses of the church building, education
6. Observe and carry out the lawful injunctions of higher courts

**Business Meeting Frequency:** HPC's typically meets monthly (Sessions are required to meet at least quarterly).  
RE Valentine, "The Session is always in session."

## REGIONAL (PRESBYTERY):

**Who makes up the Presbytery?** Teaching Elders (technically *members* of the Presbytery) and Ruling Elders, (representing their churches) within the bounds of the Presbytery.

**Roles of the Presbytery:** (BCO 13-9)

1. Handle judicial cases within its jurisdiction or handed up to it by a Session
2. Oversee candidates for pastoral ministry: licensure, ordination, installation, dismissal, & removal
3. Receive and review records from church Sessions
4. To establish or dissolve relationships between pastors and churches
5. To send missionaries and to hold pastors and missionaries accountable to their callings
6. To see that lawful rulings of higher courts are obeyed
7. To condemn erroneous teaching that damages the purity of the Church
8. To devise means of increasing the Church
9. Offer propositions to the General Assembly that would benefit the Church at large

**Business Meeting Frequency:** Quarterly (rotating between churches within the Presbytery)

## NATIONAL (GENERAL ASSEMBLY):

**Who makes up the General Assembly?** All Teaching Elders and Ruling Elders (representing their churches) throughout the denomination.

**Powers of the General Assembly:** (BCO 14-6)

1. Handle judicial cases and doctrinal controversies handed up to it by a Presbytery
2. Give advice and instruction in all cases submitted to it
3. Receive and review Presbytery records
4. To devise means of increasing the Church
5. Handle the formation, unifying, or splitting of Presbyteries
6. Instituting and superintending necessary agencies for evangelization
7. Suppress schismatical contentions
8. Overall, superintendence of the larger church
9. Interdenominational relations

And "In general to recommend measures for the promotion of charity, truth and holiness through all the churches under its care."

**Business Meeting Frequency:** Annual (Usually at some major city)