



Elder Work Summary

The System Resources & Training Available

ELDER WORK: PART OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

“Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19 NIV). The Great Commission really has two components to it.

First, there is an effort to “go” into the world and proclaim the gospel of Christ, so that the Holy Spirit might create saving faith, pulling individuals into the Church.

Second, once a person is in the Church, there is an effort to disciple him, to increase the ways he acts as a follower of Jesus Christ. That means the individual is moved along a spiritual spectrum. That spectrum includes knowledge of Scripture. Jesus said part of the Great Commission is “...teaching them....” However, that spectrum also includes service. Christians seek to grow in their sanctified living which centers on loving service of Christ and neighbor.

The traditional responsibility of the Board of Elders in our circles is to assist the pastor in providing the spiritual care necessary to move members of the congregation along that spectrum. A vital aspect of this is addressing worship delinquency.

What happens in the worship service is the high point of the week. As we gather around God’s Word and receive the sacrament, our faith is fed and strengthened. We are taught Scriptural truth. We are motivated to lovingly serve in all the ways God calls us to do so. Thus, worship is a vital component of discipleship. Elders must understand that one of their greatest responsibilities is to see that members of the congregation are, as much as humanly possible, present for what happens in worship.

To do that well requires two things. 1) Elders must have a system in place to address delinquency. 2) Elders must be trained.

ELDER SYSTEMS & TRAINING

What is the difference between those?

An elder system is an organized series of steps that ensure this important task is carried out. When it comes to dealing with delinquency, there are two crucial components to your elder system.

First, you need to know if and how long a member has been absent from worship. How is that determined? Is it simply that the pastor sits down after worship with a member directory and puts a check behind the names who was there? Is that a good system? Is it accurate? Even if the pastor can remember everyone who was there, this provides information for one week. How do you know if the member has missed two weeks... four... twelve? You need to create a system which allows you to know who has been absent for various periods of time: four weeks, eight weeks, twelve weeks, sixteen weeks.

Second, you need to have a plan of action for what happens at those periods of time. When you know a member has missed four straight weeks, what happens? Does he get a phone call? Does he get visited personally? Is the purpose of the call/visit to encourage or admonish or simply listen? Say at four weeks absent, you call someone and encourage someone to return to worship. What happens when it is identified they have now been absent for eight weeks?

An elder system organizes what happens at these various stages. Without an elder system, elder work can become haphazard. No one is certain how long an individual has been absent. Individuals may fall through the cracks. When elder work is carried out, it is inconsistent.

Elder training motivates and equips men to carry out the system in a loving, evangelical way. You might have a system that calls for the elder to visit a member who has been absent from worship for eight straight weeks. But how should the elder contact and approach that member? When visiting with the member, what exactly should the elder say? When the member makes excuses for his absenteeism, how does the elder answer? All of this requires training.

As part of the *Welcome Home* initiative, WELS Congregational Services has made elder training and system resources available to every congregation.

ONLINE ELDER TRAINING

Congregational Services has produced an online elder training program which is also titled *Welcome Home*. Go to welscongregationservices.net. At the top of the page in the navigation bar, the first link that is listed is “Servant Training.” That is

where Congregational Services is building training programs for a variety of congregational positions. Elder training is the first to be completed. Click on “Servant Training.” On the page that opens up, click on the “Elder Training” icon. That will take you to the elder training page which contains twelve chapters of videos and print resources.



There are multiple ways to use this online training. Probably the best is to assemble the pastor(s) and those who are to serve as elders and work through the videos and discussion questions together. It will take awhile to work through all twelve chapters. But they will not only help you think through what elder system might work best in your congregation, it will also equip your elders to work that system well.

“THE PETER PLAN”

In the *Welcome Home* resources, under the “Elder Work” heading, you will find multiple files for *The Peter Plan*. This is one sample elder system, so that you don’t need to produce one entirely from scratch. It also contains materials that help you communicate to your members why you are implementing a new elder system. If your members are not accustomed to having their attendance tracked, they need to understand the rationale.

In Conclusion

When we hear “The Great Commission” we tend to think of evangelism. Certainly, that is a vital component of the Commission. But so is elder work. For a congregation to carry out the Commission well, it needs to have elders who have established a system to address delinquency promptly and evangelically and who have been motivated and trained to follow that system zealously.

May God bless your discipleship efforts!