

Start or revitalize a ministry in your church

QUICK START GUIDE



MINISTRY OF THE ELDER



Quick Start Guide for Elders

Available from:
AdventSource
5120 Prescott Avenue
Lincoln, NE 68506
402.486.8800
AdventSource.org

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Printed in the United States of America

ISBN # 978-1-62909-390-1

Introduction

Thank you for serving as an elder for your local congregation. Your church has entrusted you with a sacred responsibility that will take prayer, time, effort, patience, and sometimes even the wisdom of Solomon. If you are feeling overwhelmed, remember that this is normal. Fall to your knees and turn it over to God. He's in control and will use you if you allow Him to.

Before beginning to serve, it is always good to review the responsibilities and the biblical mandate for your position. This Quick Start Guide is designed to give you an overview of such roles and responsibilities. Additionally, you will have the opportunity to explore your role in your local congregation and how you can best meet the needs of those who worship with your church family.

The role of church elder is not to be taken lightly. The Bible gives specific instruction on the duties and commitments that God expects from those set aside for this position. This isn't a role requiring that you only show up on Sabbath morning to call for the offering or introduce the speaker; it asks for a serious time commitment. This position also requires discretion, diplomacy, and confidentiality when you are involved in sensitive matters involving other church members.

As you study this guide, you may choose to seek more answers. You will be able to find additional information in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* and the *Seventh-day Adventist Elder's Handbook*. These are available through your local Adventist Book Center and AdventSource. As an elder, you should also study and know what the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* says about the mission, work, and administration of the church.

Thank you for being willing to serve in this capacity. Remember to ask for God's guidance as you seek to tell others about His love and sacrifice for their eternal lives.

What Does the Bible Say About Elders?

In the Old Testament, the term "elder" refers to more than someone advanced in years; it could also be someone who has maturity, experience, and wisdom. Generally, references to elders speak of heads of families or tribes.

When God created the world, He established the model of organization among His people. In the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God used the patriarchal system as the basis for worship within the family. He gave clear instructions on how worship and the symbols of sacrifice were to be conducted.

As the generations passed, God called a nation out of slavery and led them to the Promised Land. During this period, the children of Israel were called to witness God's love and enduring promises.

Even though God designated Moses to be the leader of the multitude coming out of Egypt,



He also showed that effective leadership must be delegated. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, showed wisdom and experience when he told Moses, "This work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. Select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. If you do this and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these people will go home satisfied" (Genesis 18: 17, 21-23 NIV).

God spoke to Moses a second time about elders when He said, "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone" (Numbers 11:16, 17 NIV).

During New Testament times, the terms designating this position included elder, bishop, and overseer. "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust" (Acts 14:23 NIV). After this, He left them to go open work in new fields.

In fact, after the death and resurrection of Christ, God once again called His people, now both Jews and Gentiles, to become a community of believers. During this period He also gave instructions for the leadership positions of the church and their responsibilities.

These verses show that God recognizes the need of His people working together and supporting each other. The local elder provides spiritual leadership to the church family, as well as helping the pastor meet church and community needs. It is important that leaders have the necessary support of their constituents.

Elders in Seventh-day Adventist Church History

The Seventh-day Adventist Church designated the position of elder early in its history. The very first congregations elected deacons only, but that changed in 1861. After careful study, church leaders declared that the model of elders and deacons was the biblical form of leadership.

Within the framework of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, if a local congregation has not been assigned a pastor by the local conference, the elder fills the shepherding needs of the congregation, including preaching, visiting, evangelizing, and providing administrative leadership.

"When a great and decisive work is to be done, God chooses men and women to do this work, and it will see the loss if the talents of both are not combined."
(Ellen White, *Evangelism*, page 469)



In order for a nominating committee to consider a person for the position of elder, that person must meet certain requirements. These requirements include:

1. Having a total commitment to God and serving others.
2. Maintaining a growing relationship with Jesus. Your spirituality can't be something that is taken out and dusted off on Sabbath morning.
3. Being willing to share your personal time; you must be able to balance between church, family and employment. You should expect to spend a minimum of 2-4 hours per week outside of Sabbath fulfilling your obligations as elder.
4. Not speaking against the church and its beliefs, leaders, and practices. Your spiritual leadership must be based on Christ and the Bible.
5. Ensuring that your family dynamics are representative of your relationship with Christ.
6. Having no hint of sexual impurity, including adultery and pornography use.
7. Knowing God loves and created all people equally. As reflectors of Christ, we can do no less than love all persons.
8. Returning an honest tithe and financially supporting the work and mission of the church, both locally and internationally.
9. Confessing sins and admitting mistakes. Being a transparent leader and good example to church members.
10. Reconciling members in disagreement with each other or church leadership. You can accomplish this through building relationships with members and praying for them.

QUALIFICATIONS OF AN ELDER

1. Has a personal and growing relationship with Jesus
2. Is elected and ordained by the local church congregation
3. Is highly respected and supportive of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its beliefs
4. Possesses leadership and administrative skills
5. Is willing to share time and talent
6. Has a servant attitude, recognizing that in God we are all equal

Administrative and Organizational Roles

Elders are part of a team that includes the pastor, board of elders, church board, and church officers. This team sees to the overall functions and work of the local church. Elders help provide direction in the vision and implementation of the church's mission in the community.



Attending committee meetings is only one part of an elder's administrative duties. All elders should attend board of elders meetings, church board meetings, and church business meetings. Additionally, they may be asked to serve on other committees established by the local church.

In these committees, the elder has the opportunity to help members develop community outreach ministries.

As an elder, you should have a basic understanding of church leadership. Learn what kinds of duties are expected of the church clerk, treasurer, deacons and deaconesses, personal ministries leader, Sabbath school superintendent, etc.

Church Discipline

Because we live in a sinful world, it has become necessary to deal with discipline even in the church. Recognize that discipline is necessary to maintain the integrity and health of the church and its members. As an elder, you must understand the different levels of church discipline, including censuring and dropping from membership. Remember that you will be privy to private information that must be kept confidential. You will need to unite with other elders in prayer as you grapple with difficult decisions to call actions sins and deal with them in a biblical and loving manner. Remember that failing to discipline could eventually lead someone away from God rather than closer to Him.

Planning

When a church has a long-term vision of their work in the community, it helps them be more effective in developing ministries and outreach activities that will draw people to Christ. Elders assist with planning these activities.

ROLE OF THE LOCAL CHURCH ELDER

Elders will be called upon to work in numerous areas of church life. These include:

- The administration and organization of the local church, as well as helping members utilize their spiritual gifts
- Leading the congregation in outreach that moves toward church growth
- Assuring that new converts are cared for both spiritually and relationally
- Leading worship services and activities
- Preaching
- Visitation
- Participating in church committees
- Actively maintaining a pastor-elder working relationship
- Mentoring members to become strong leaders

See page 11 for resources.



Annual planning should include the following areas:

1. **Evangelism**—What will your church do to tell the story of Jesus this year? Will you have a 6-week evangelistic campaign? Will members give Bible studies? Are you targeting a specific age or people group? How can you most effectively reach your community?

2. **Nurture**—As you plan evangelistic activities, don't forget that you must nurture the newest members of your church family. Research indicates that new church members must establish friendships with at least six people during the first six months after they are baptized or they will most likely drift away. Plan to address

this each time someone is baptized or voted into membership. Be proactive in keeping new members by laying a solid foundation of nurture and friendship building. Consider the following: Does your church need to develop a nurture committee? Will you assign spiritual guardians? How will you ensure that their circle of church friends grows?

As well as nurturing new members, how will your church reach out to long-time members? Do you have a plan for visiting shut-in, sick, and non-attending members? How will you meet the needs of different groups within your congregation, such as single parents, empty nesters, and retirees? How do you help members who have transferred their membership to your church and are new to the community?

3. **Youth**—This is a critical area for planning and retaining future members. Work with and support the youth leaders; make sure they are not overlooked or overworked. Be their advocate when developing a church budget. Develop friendships with the youth in your church. Know their names and interests. Be supportive of training and allow the youth to have leadership positions so they can develop their ministry and leadership skills.

4. **College students**—Make sure the college students in your congregation receive attention and support. If there are students who are attending school away from home, is your church sending the message that they are important? This can be done by making sure they receive a Sabbath school quarterly and other printed material from their home church. Invite them to share their experiences when they are home on break. Find ways to keep them involved in ministry when they are home, especially in the summer.

GROUPS TO NURTURE

- Newly baptized members
- Single parents
- Empty nesters
- People experiencing transition or crisis
- Retirees
- Shut-ins
- Non-attending members
- Graduates
- New parents
- College students
- Children and youth that may not have anyone at home to encourage them spiritually



Are there college students attending local public colleges in your area? If so, are you meeting their needs? They are away from home and would probably enjoy a home-cooked meal.

Two of the greatest challenges Adventist college students face when they attend a public college or university are Friday night and Sabbath activities. Often their dorm or apartment environment isn't conducive to keeping Sabbath holy. Is there a way your church family can make a difference in this area?

Try involving this group in your ministry outreach and planning. College students appreciate being asked to participate and share ideas. Listen and give consideration to their thoughts and suggestions. They often know what is happening and may understand what it takes to reach others.

5. **Young adults**—This group is often overlooked and under-utilized. Generally, young adults have finished their college education; they are transitioning to new jobs and are trying to settle into a community and church. They want responsibility and positions in the church but often don't know how to begin. Receiving encouragement and acknowledgement from their local church will help familiarize this valuable group with your congregation. They will help keep your church family alive and growing.
6. **Church facilities**—It is necessary to assess the physical church structure annually. What needs to be updated—carpet, paint, bathrooms, kitchen? Are there bigger projects to address? If so, how will the church budget for these extra expenses?
7. **Master church calendar**—This helps the church see major events for the year. It will also help departments unite their efforts to minister to those within the church and community.
8. **Campaigns**—What will you need to promote during the year—stewardship, church building fundraising, or scholarship funds for worthy students? Who will lead these committees? Have these events been entered into the master church calendar? You don't want to have two or three fundraising efforts going at the same time. This can lead to donor fatigue and giving will drop.

Leading Worship Services and Activities

Worship is an important aspect of church family life. To be God-honoring, thought and planning must be given to the worship service. This doesn't mean the elder must do all the planning, but he or she should assist those working on the worship services.

As an elder it is important to have a good understanding of the role of worship—how it can be directed toward God and not self, why different types of worship activities meet the spiritual needs of different people, etc. Most worship services are geared for people who respond to auditory programming. Do your worship services also have something for those who respond visually and kinetically? What are the components of worshipping God in your church, and do they need to be improved or changed? Who is leading out in the worship service? Does



participation need to be expanded? These and other questions can be discussed between the elders, church board, and worship committee.

Visitation

One of the elder's biblical roles is to build a relationship within the congregation and the community. This can't be accomplished if you only speak with a member on Sabbath morning or don't interact with others outside the church.

Visiting seems to be becoming a lost art. Elders can set the example for others by establishing a visitation plan. Work with your pastor and the other elders to develop a plan that will work best for your congregation. Include the deacons and deaconesses as well as members. Make sure members are being visited as well as non-members.

Your church receives lists of names of people who have requested Bible study follow-up. Are these people being visited or slipping through the cracks? This can happen when a church doesn't have a visitation plan.

Use visitation time to build friendships and learn of spiritual struggles. As you visit, encourage and offer support. Don't let the time deteriorate into a gripe session about everything that is wrong with the church, the pastor, or the church leadership. Keep the visitation positive and short. If you feel the need to have a longer visit, make plans ahead of time with the person and allow them to make time in their schedule.

Telephone Visitation

Because of today's busy schedules, sometimes it is easier to fit in a phone visit. While these should not be used to replace an in-home visit, they are acceptable to do a couple of times a year. Here are some tips for phone visits with your members.

PREACHING TIPS

As an elder, expect that you will be occasionally asked to preach. If you feel you need help in this area, ask your pastor for guidance and even a short training course on sermon preparation. Fill your sermon preparation time with prayer and ask God to lead you in the message He wants you to share. This isn't about your agenda; it's about allowing God to work through you to draw others to Him.

Practice your sermon before Sabbath morning. The more time you spend with your notes, the better prepared you will feel. This will allow you to deliver your message with confidence and poise.

Remember that preaching shouldn't be reduced to standing up and reading passages out of a book. Find ways to engage those you are speaking to. Use illustrations (get permission from family members if you are using stories from home); choose a theme for your sermon and follow it by making points clear and applicable for your listeners. This isn't a time to openly rebuke individuals; rather, use it as a time to turn their hearts to God and their role in telling others about Him.

See page 11 for resources.



1. **Make the call.** Identify yourself and that you are an elder of their church. Tell them that the elders are making calls to stay in touch with all members of the church.
2. **Be friendly.** Show interest in them and their family.
3. **Keep it positive.** Talk about the good things happening at church. Ask how God is blessing them.
4. **Personal concerns.** If the conversation turns to a member expressing dissatisfaction with another member, remind them to consider the process of Matthew 18:15-17.
5. **Dealing with requests.** If the person requests something specific, let them know that you will check on it and follow up with them soon. This may include rides to church, help with yard clean-up, etc. Be sure to get back to them promptly.
6. **Remember confidentiality.** If members tell you something of a personal nature, remember you are bound by trust not to share it with others. If you think it is something that might have legal ramifications, you should talk with your pastor for guidelines on what to do.
7. **Be available.** Let them know that you can make an in-home visit. Give them your phone number and say that you are available if they need to talk.

Keep your call short and remember to pray for the person you are talking with.

Mentoring Members for Leadership

Mentoring future leaders is one of the most important duties of an elder. This includes modeling a strong spiritual life, bringing others to Jesus, and training others to use their spiritual gifts for service.

Help your members understand their spiritual gifts and how these help determine where and how they could minister. Encourage each member to learn about his or her spiritual gifts and help them find meaningful ways to implement these gifts in their ministry. Give them opportunities to fill leadership roles at different levels so the growing church will have the able leaders it needs.

It is best that male elders mentor the male members of the church and female elders mentor female members. The position of elder must be respected and no actions should be taken that could give any hint of impropriety or misconduct.

Maintaining Integrity While Counseling

There will be times when you are asked to counsel church members of the opposite sex. Maintaining integrity during your counseling sessions is of utmost importance. Leaders don't intend to fall into Satan's snare of infidelity but it does happen more often than we think.



Sexual immorality is a sin that can destroy you, your family, and your congregation. Use these guidelines to help keep your counseling sessions pure and to recognize if there is a problem developing. Don't allow any room for rumors or innuendoes to begin circulating among the church family.

Tips for Counseling

1. Don't put yourself in a situation that could be misconstrued. If possible, a male elder should counsel male members and a female elder should counsel female members.
2. Never counsel someone alone. You need to minimize risk by having someone else with you or at least in an area adjacent to where you are holding the counseling session. This could be a senior church officer or your spouse. Remind them that your meeting with the person is confidential and they are not to discuss it with others.
3. Your counseling should consist of only one or two sessions and last no longer than one hour. If the problem can't be resolved in this length of time, you should refer the person to your pastor or a Christian professional.
4. Make sure your spiritual connection with God is strong and growing daily. You can't hear Him if you aren't carrying on a conversation!
5. Watch for the following warning signs and if they occur, end your counseling sessions immediately by referring the person to someone else. You are in danger and placing the other person in danger if you answer the following questions positively.
 - Am I looking forward to this session? Am I concerned about what I'm wearing?
 - Am I rearranging my schedule just to be able to meet with this person?
 - Are we meeting at inappropriate locations or times, such as my office after hours or for lunch?
 - Am I beginning to fantasize about this person?
 - Am I beginning to keep things from my spouse, especially what I am doing with my time and that I am counseling this person?
 - Do I think infidelity can't happen to me?

Sexual misconduct is sin. As a leader of the church, you have influence and people are watching how you act. Your actions will impact others for eternity. Choosing to be pure in your actions reflects the true character of God.

Pastor-Elder Relations

As an elder, you will be working closely with your pastor. While the pastor is human, he or she is God-sent. The pastor did not come to your church by his or her own accord, but by God's selection and anointing through the process designated by the conference. The elder



is responsible to uphold the office of pastor (Numbers 12:1-10; Hebrews 13:7, 17).

Pray daily for the pastor's family and let them know that you are doing so. This will be encouraging. You don't know what burdens they carry that they are unable to share with others. Understand that your pastor knows much more about situations happening in the private lives of members; this can be a huge burden to carry alone. If you haven't already done so, begin to develop a relationship with your pastor that is more than greeting each other on Sabbath morning. Discover where your pastor's hobbies and interests lie. Find ways for your families to participate in social activities together. When you are meeting socially, discussing church business should be off-limits. This can hinder getting to know each other because you are being distracted by church work.

HOW TO HELP YOUR PASTOR BE SUCCESSFUL

1. Pray daily for your pastor's family.
2. Develop a friendship with your pastor that goes beyond church-related items.
3. Publicly support your pastor. Discuss differences of opinion privately.
4. Ensure your pastor is taking regular downtime. No one can operate effectively without a little rest and relaxation.
5. Learn your pastor's strengths and find ways to supplement weak areas. Remember, no one can do everything. The body of Christ functions best when everyone works together.

Be publicly supportive of your pastor. If you have differences, talk privately and share your concerns. Openly disagreeing with leadership only divides members and causes hard feelings. If members come to you with gossip about the pastor, don't listen. If they are critical, tell them that you support the pastor. Remind them that there is a biblical process in Matthew 18 about dealing with disagreements. Ask them if they have followed this process and if not, encourage them to do so.

Make sure your pastor takes personal time for renewal. It is easy to allow the work of the kingdom to displace the work of the family.

Know and understand that a pastor is human and can't do everything. That is why other leaders are nominated to help with the work of the church. Lend your support and be willing to work with your pastor.

Conclusion

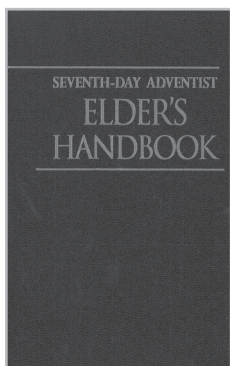
Be united with your family about your role as elder. Discuss how this will impact your family. Pray together for God's leading in this new role and ministry. Also understand that at times you will feel increased attacks on your family. There is a battle being waged by unseen forces, which want to distract and even destroy your ministry. You and your family will only be able to combat this with regular prayer and worship.



As you work with the pastor, your fellow elders, and other leaders of your church, recognize that you are part of the greatest mission on earth—telling others about Jesus.

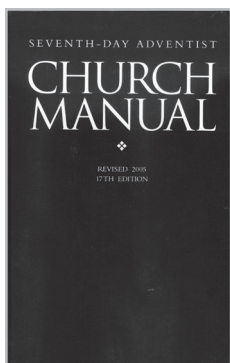
Resources

The following resources are available from AdventSource. For a complete list, visit AdventSource.org or call 402.486.8800.



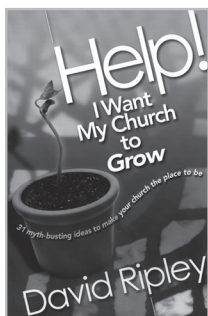
Elder's Handbook

Prepared by the GC Ministerial Association (General Conference)
In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, local elders preach more sermons, visit more members, and give more personal counsel than pastors do. This handbook will help these leaders understand their calling and leadership role and assist them in their pastoral and nurturing functions.
Product #417595



Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual

Prepared by the General Conference (Review & Herald)
The official manual of the Seventh-day Adventist Church includes all organization issues and structure, membership and transfer requirements, and a list of church officers and their duties. Also find processes for the nominating committee and church discipline.
Product #520380



Help! I Want My Church to Grow

By David Ripley (Review & Herald)
Pastor David Ripley exposes the 31 most widespread misconceptions that keep churches from growing into vibrant communities. Ripley identifies pitfalls and offers principles that will attract people to your church. This book will introduce you to myth-busting ideas that will expand God's kingdom right in your own church.
Product #417538



Quick Start Guide for Church Board Members

Created by the North American Division

The church board is a vital committee in every Adventist church. Board members are legally and morally responsible for all activities of the congregation. Learn about your role as a church board member.

Product #416220



Local Church Elder Ministry Description

Introduction

God asks the church to be a community of people sharing a common purpose and fellowship, continually growing in faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God. Paul describes the church as “. . . his body, the fullness of him who filleth everything in every way” (Ephesians 1:22).

God calls us into His body for the purpose of establishing a saving relationship with Him and community with one another. The Holy Spirit convicts our minds, leads us to repentance, and plants us within the church.

The symbol of water baptism marks our entrance into the body of Christ and also marks the baptism of the Holy Spirit experienced by a new disciple. “I tell you the truth, unless a man is born of the water and the Spirit, He cannot enter the kingdom of God” (John 3:5). The Holy Spirit is the vital life force of the church. When you come to Christ, you are prepared by the Holy Spirit, who has already led you to repentance, for service.

When a church serves the world it is an expression of the love of Christ to the world. It is the body of Christ that is serving the world’s needs and being used by the Spirit as an agency of salvation. Thus, the church is a servant body. It serves the Lord in praise, serves one another in love, and serves the world in humility. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

God calls every member of the church into ministry. The church is a kingdom of priests set free to minister for Christ. Our priesthood is to each other within the church and to the world. An elder, like any other church officer, is a ministering servant of God. Every Christian believer is called to ministry, gifted by the Holy Spirit, and in baptism ordained for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12).

It was during the middle ages that the clergy became distinct from other members as a superior element in the church. The biblical concept of laity includes all believers as ministers in the body. In actuality, the church today still has a great distance to go before effectively applying this concept. You should view the work of an elder as a ministry to which God calls people; it is His will operating in their lives.

Duties of the Elder

The ministry to which a person is called when he or she becomes an elder can best be described in the following ways:

- 1. Visitation.** Nurture develops on a horizontal level in the church, with members offering encouragement and spiritual counsel to one another. In such a caring community, even the pastor is nurtured through the membership of the church. An elder can be a vital element in this kind of caring church. The elder can actively visit members in their homes, encourage others to do so, and assist in the training of prospective members.

- 2. Commitment.** It is especially important for the local elder to be committed to the outreach of the church. The congregation needs to know that its leaders have a clear vision of the church's mission. It has been said that church growth is "caught" rather than taught. When an elder enthusiastically models a commitment of his or her time to outreach ministry, others catch the same spirit and commit themselves to the mission of the church. An elder should schedule time for ministering to the unsaved.
- 3. Worship leadership.** An elder's involvement and leadership can make a tremendous difference in the weekly worship celebration service of the church. Quality leadership and participation can transform a dull, lifeless worship service into meaningful celebration and praise. Skills in worship leadership, such as the reading of scripture, offering public prayers, planning the order of service, and in smaller churches at least, delivering sermons should be developed.
- 4. A spiritual mentor.** The spiritual life of an elder should constantly lead members of the church to seek a deeper spiritual experience for themselves. I Timothy, chapter 3, describes the Christian life of an elder in these words: ". . . above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle. . ." An elder should model, by his or her devotional life, Christian personality and spiritual interest, a higher ideal for each member to reach. The elder should reflect the fruits of the Spirit in his or her relationship with others: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.
- 5. Church administration.** An elder should always attempt to make a positive contribution to the organization and progress of the church. While doing this, he or she should not try to dominate but rather enable others to participate in decision-making in the church and ministry. An elder often serves in an advisory capacity to various departments, committees, and projects. In doing this, the elder provides unity among the various programs of the church, communicates progress to the church board, and encourages a unified mission.

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Ministry of the Elder

This Quick Start Guide for Elders is full of important information to help you fulfill your responsibilities to your church. This guide contains a job description, instructions for getting started, tips for maintaining a successful ministry, troubleshooting suggestions, recommended resources, and more. Whether you're new to this ministry or an experienced volunteer, this Quick Start Guide will inspire you with lots of great ideas you can immediately put to use in your local church.

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ISBN: 978-1-62909-390-1



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