



A major contributor to reformed theology was John Calvin, who converted from Roman Catholicism after training for the priesthood and the law. While in exile in Geneva, Switzerland, Calvin developed the Presbyterian pattern of church government.

As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with particular gifts to share in discernment of God's Spirit and governance of God's people. Accordingly, congregations elect persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, and with demonstrated skills of leadership and compassion to be ruling elders. (G-2.0301)

Ruling elders are so named not because they "lord it over" the congregation but are elected to discern and measure its fidelity to the Word of God, and to strengthen and nurture its faith and life. (F-3.0202)

When elected they serve faithfully as members of the Session. When elected as commissioners to higher governing bodies, elders participate and vote with the same authority as teaching elders, and they are eligible for any office.

Ruling elders are both elected and ordained. Through ordination they are officially set apart for service. They retain their ordination beyond their term in office.

Teaching elders (also called ministers of the Word and Sacrament) equip the people of God for ministry and witness. They may serve in a variety of ministries, as authorized by the presbytery. When they serve as preachers and teachers of the Word, they preach and teach the faith of the church. When they serve at font and table they interpret the mysteries of grace. When they serve as pastors they support the people in the disciplines of the faith. (G-2.0501)

These presbyters come together in councils in regular gradation. These councils are sessions, presbyteries, synods and General Assembly. (F-3.0203)