

# **ELDERS WHO SERVE WELL**

**PRESENTER:**

**JAMES F. DANIEL, PhD**



# INTRODUCTION

- Leadership in the Seventh-day Adventist church depends on the service of elders.
- Pastors serve for a limited period, but elders are constant in their presence.

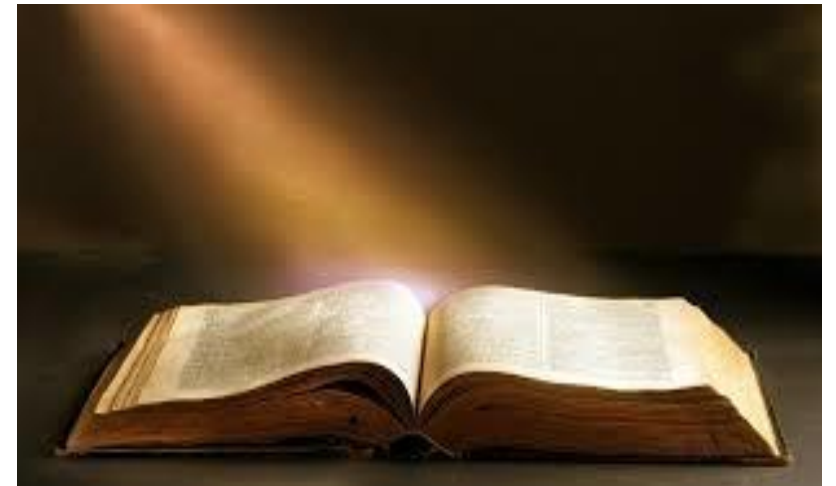


# Definition

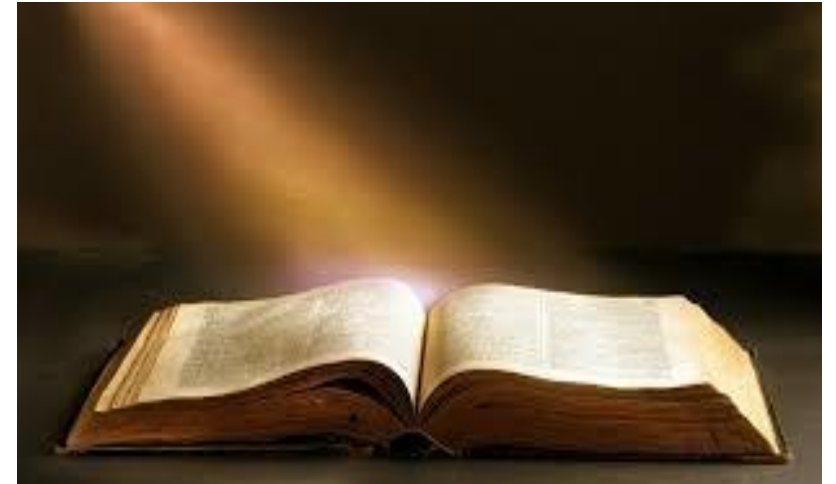
- In context of leadership in Church, the word “**Elder**” means:
  - **Leader.** (*Elder’s Handbook*)
  - **Ambassador.** (*Elder’s Handbook*)
  - **Shepherd** of the flock of God (1 Peter 5:2).
  - **Overseer** of the flock of God (1 Peter 5:2).
  - **Bishop.** (Titus 1:7).
  - **Steward** of God (Titus 1:7).

# HISTORY OF ELDERS IN THE CHURCH

- The Bible calls for the service of elders among God's people.
- The term "**elder**" is used in both the Old and New Testaments.
- In the Old Testament, elders were older persons who were heads of households, prominent men of the tribes, and leaders or rulers in the community.



- The term first appeared in Exodus 12:21 as head of a major family.
- In Numbers 11:16 it appears as leader:  
“The Lord said to Moses: ‘Bring me seventy of Israel’s elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people’”  
(*NIV*).
- See also Jeremiah 19:1; Exodus 3:16



- In the New Testament, the title refers to more than the age and experience of the leader, but also to the role of *spiritual guardian* of the congregation (1 Pet. 5:1-3).
- The office of elder in the New Testament church is rooted in the office of elder among the Jewish people and was invested with similar authority.
- The first mention of elder in the Church is in **Acts 11:30**, in reference to the council at Jerusalem, around 44 AD.

- Elders were associated with the apostles in the governance of the church (Acts 16:4), providing spiritual care for the congregation, exercising leadership, and giving instruction (Titus 1:9; James 5:13-15; 1 Pet. 5:1-4).
- They were members of the Council at Jerusalem, with the apostles, that considered with the question of circumcision of gentiles. Acts 15:6.

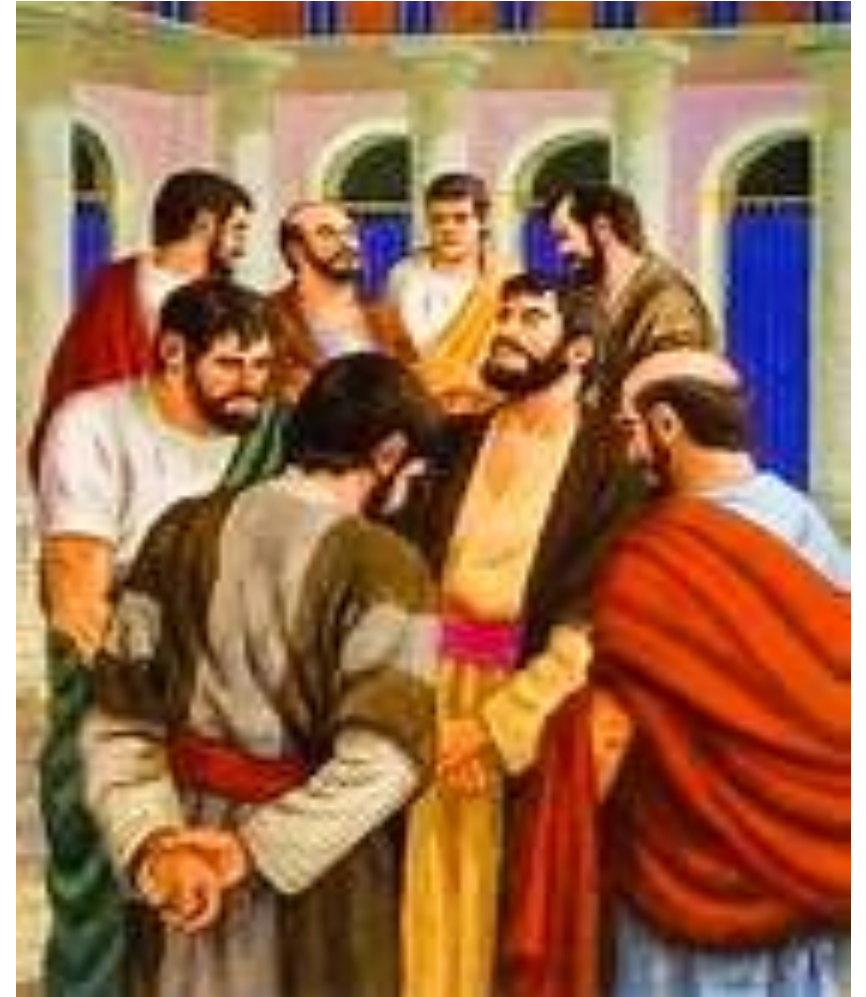




- There were two types of leaders in the New Testament church:
  - 1. Apostles:** Itinerant workers who provided teaching, planning, administration, and evangelism.
  - 2. Lay elders:** Assigned to local congregations and provided a ministry that gave strength and direction to the local church.
- That model has continued in the church in various forms.



- Paul instructed Titus to “appoint elders in every town [church]” (Titus 1:5 *NIV*).
- These elders guided the church and helped to advance God’s mission to the world (*Elder’s Handbook, Chap. 1, p. 24*).



# WHAT IS LEADER AND LEADERSHIP?

- “A Leader is one who gets things done with the help of others” (Larry C. Spears, ed., *Reflections on Leadership*, p. 80).
- Leadership is giving purpose and direction to collective effort, resulting in expansion and fulfilment of the mission of the church. (J. Daniel)



# ELDERS IN THE ADVENTIST CHURCH

- Elders in the Seventh-day Adventist Church function as spiritual leaders.
- “Elders must be recognized by the church as strong spiritual leaders and must have good reputations both in the church and community. In the absence of a pastor, elders are the spiritual leaders of the church and by precept and example must seek to lead the church into a deeper and fuller Christian experience” (*Church Manual*, Chapter 8, p. 73).

# How We got Here

- The earliest Adventist congregations elected deacons as the only church officers.
- In 1854 and 1855, Joseph Bates and J. B. Frisbie wrote of two kinds of church leaders: (1) Those who traveled from church to church, and (2) those who had pastoral care of one church (elders).

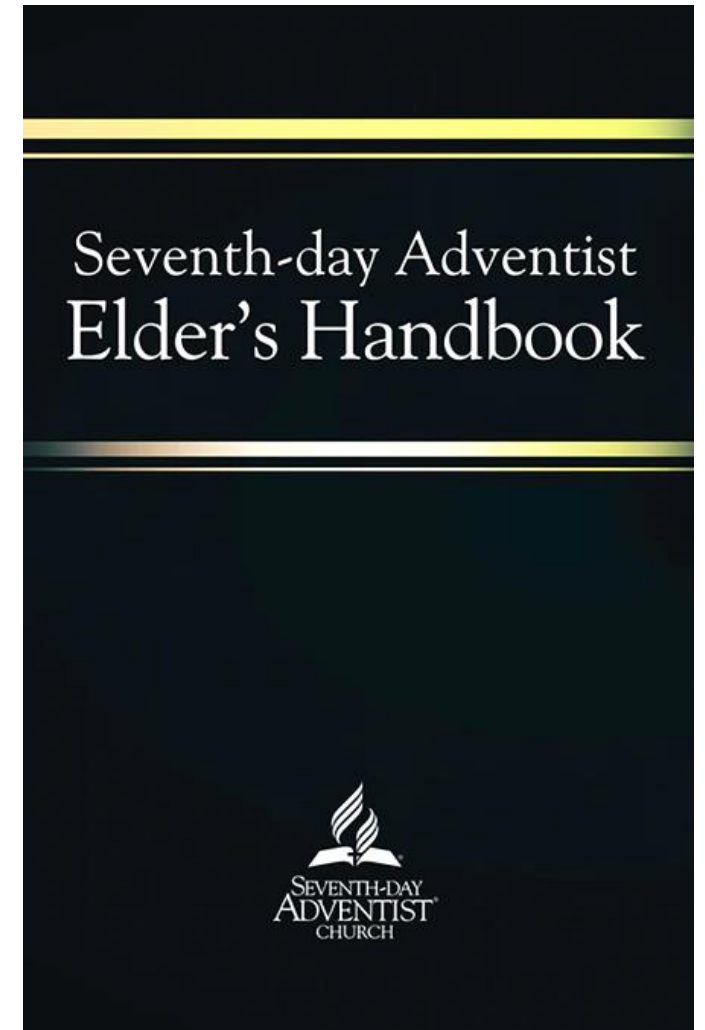
***Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1976 ed.): “Church Elder.”**

Elder’s Handbook, Chapter 1, p. 22.

- In 1861, J. N. Loughborough, Moses Hull, and M. E. Cornell studied the biblical model of church organization and concluded that the election and ordination of elders and deacons in local churches was clearly prescribed.

*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia (1976 ed.):*  
"Church Elder."

**Elder's Handbook**, Chapter 1, p. 22.



- In 1874, Church leader G. I. Butler wrote that the elder was the principal officer in the church with the role of advisor. Only the church body had the authority to make decisions.
- Other tasks were soon added to the elder, including “the work of correcting, admonishing, and overseeing in the church.” (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1976 ed.): “Church Elder.”)





By 1875, the church agreed that elders should visit both active and inactive members, baptize, conduct the ordinances in the absence of the evangelist/pastor, call business meetings, and supervise the departments in the local church. (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* (1976 ed.): "Church Elder.")





- In March 1975, the Spring Meeting of the GC Executive Committee approved the ordination of **women as elders** if “the greatest discretion and caution” are followed. (*The Welcome Table: Setting a Place for Ordained Women*, 1995, p. 341).



In October 1984, the Annual Counsel of the GC reaffirm the 1975 decision, and also voted: "To advise each division that it is free to make provisions as it may deem necessary for the election and ordination of women as local church elders."

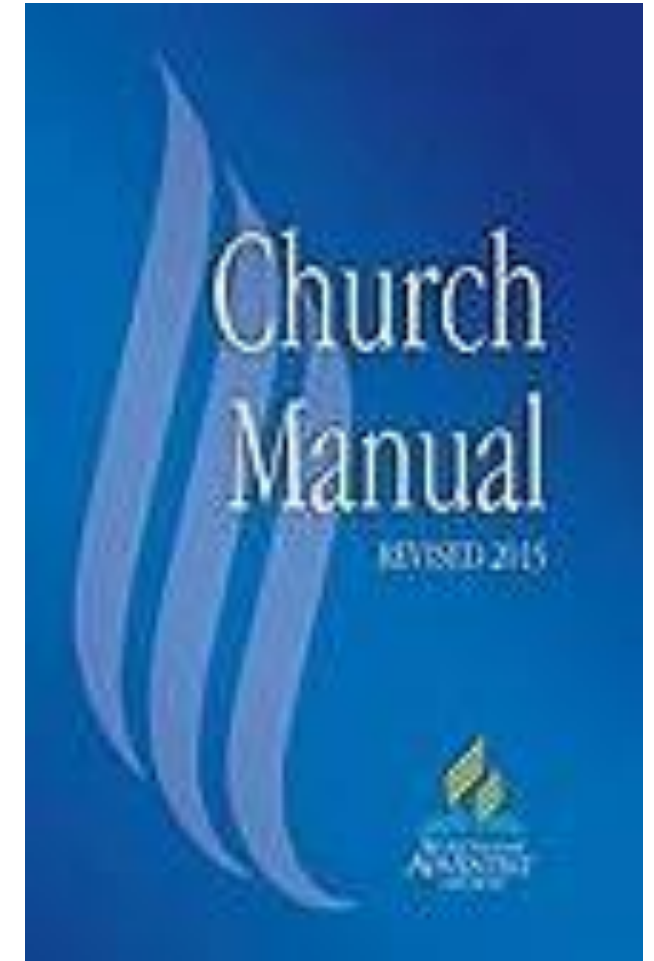
- Guidelines were also provided.

*(General Conference Committee, Annual Council Minutes, October 14, 1984: 84-387)*

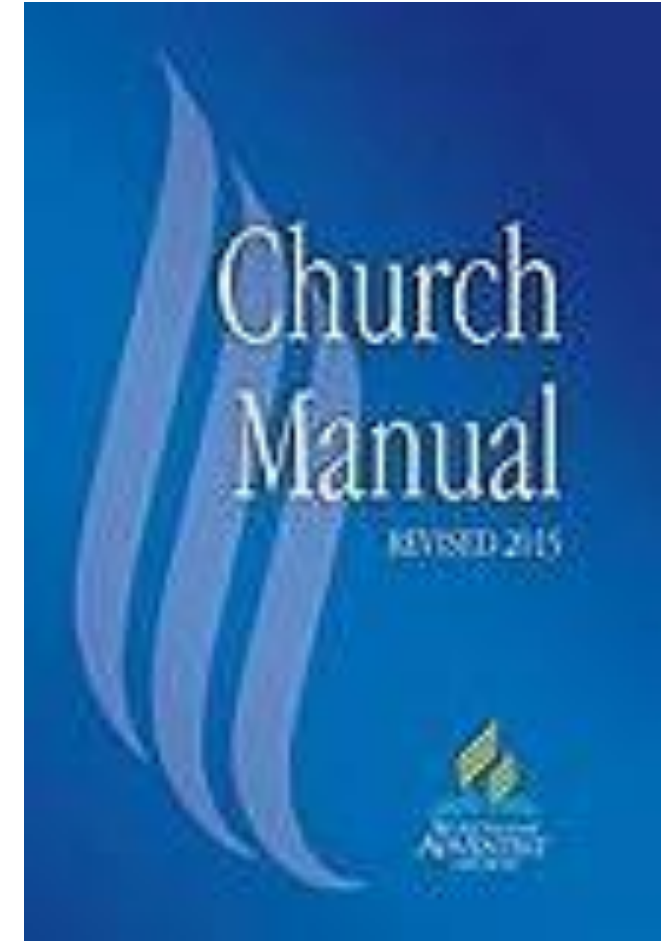


- The 1990 GC Session amended the *Church Manual* by removing the masculine gender from the description of the local church elder.

“Session actions: Fifty-fifth General Conference Session, July 11, 1990 -- Ordination of Local Elder—Church Manual Revision,” in ***Adventist Review***, July 17, 1990, p. 15.



- **Churcher Leader.** “Between election and ordination, the elected elder may function as church leader but not administer the ordinances of the church” (*Church Manual*, 2015 ed., Chapter 8, “Elders”).
- When “no one possesses the experience and qualifications to serve as an elder . . . . the church should elect a person to be known as ‘leader’” (*Church Manual*: Chapter 8, “Church Leaders,” p. 77).





# AUTHORITY OF THE ELDER

- “At the level of the local congregation, the elders/bishops seem to have consistently enjoyed the greatest authority. One of their main functions was general pastoral care and oversight (Acts. 20:17-28; 1 Peter 5:1-3), with special tasks such as giving instructions in sound doctrine and refuting those who contradicted it (1 Tim. 3:1,2; Titus 1:5,9). [*Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, p. 560].

- The people who are being led, give authority to others to lead by electing them as leaders, or respecting the system that assigns them. The authority of elders is delegated authority.



- Christ is head of the Church and the source of authority in all things. He exercises His authority in the Church through its leaders.
- Leaders in the church are called by God and chosen by the congregation to lead.
- The Church in **Business Meeting** is the highest authority in the local congregation; the church board is the second highest authority.

*(Church Manual, Chapter 8, "Business Meetings").*



# **SPIRITUAL NATURE OF THE CHURCH**

- The Church is not a human organization, but a divinely created fellowship of sinners who trust a common Savior.
- The members of the church are all one with Christ in a union realized by the Holy Spirit. They are the covenant people of God.
- The nature of the church is therefore spiritual: The body of Christ. (1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27)
- It is a sacred task to lead the church.

# Purpose of the Church

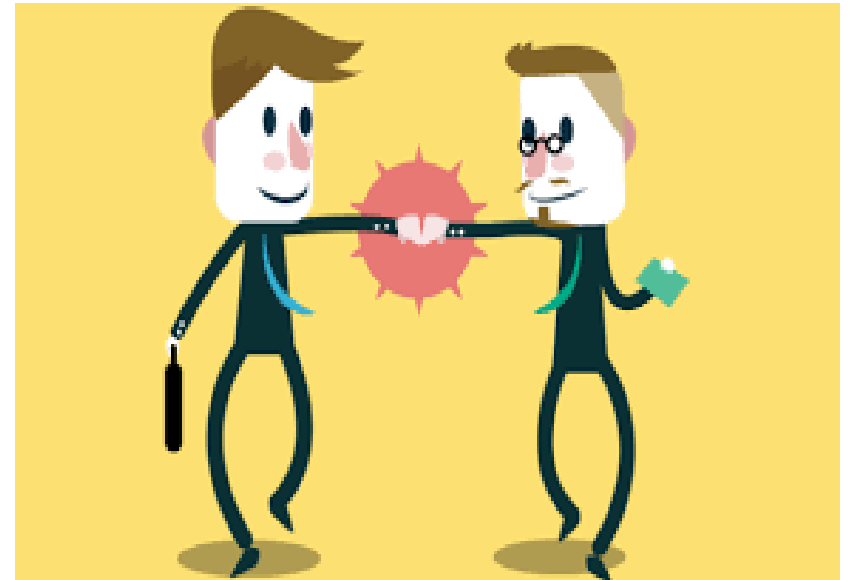
- The purpose of the church is to enable its members to fulfill the gospel commission and “make disciples of all the nations” (Matthew 28:19, *NIV*).
- The church does not exist for the sake of itself as an institution, but for its people and its mission. (*Elder’s Handbook*, Chapter 1)



# HOW TO SERVE WELL

- Elders are elected to lead the church effectively.
- *“Elders who provide effective leadership must be counted worthy of double honor” (1 Timothy 5:17 NET Bible).*
- The Church **Manual** and the Elder’s **Handbook** outline the duties of elders. They highlight that diligence to duty and humility are required:

- The local church elder is assistant to the church pastor. “In the absence of a pastor, elders are the spiritual leaders of the church” (Manual, Chap. 1, p. 73).
- “Under the pastor, or in the absence of the pastor, an elder is responsible for the services of the church” (Manual, Chap. 1, p. 74).
- “The pastoral work of the church should be shared by the pastor and the elders” (Manual, Chap. 1, p. 74).



- “The pastor . . . should be considered the ranking officer and the local elders as assistants” (Manual, Chap. 1, pp. 73-74).
- Requirement: **TEAM LEADERSHIP.**
- Team leadership recognizes that no one person possesses all the gifts, ideas, knowledge and abilities. (1 Cor. 12:7-11).



- The members of a team are committed to the growth and success of each other and hold themselves mutually accountable. Together they lead.  
(George Barna, *The Power of Team Leadership*, p. 24)
- *Competition is easy; collaboration is a challenge.*
- “Conflict is inevitable, but Combat is optional” (Faith leader — Max Lucado).





- Moses led with a team; he did not wear himself out. (Exodus 18)
- Nehemiah relied on a team. (Nehemiah 3)
- Jesus built a team of leaders. (Matthew 10)
- Paul ministered with a team (Acts 13, 15-16), and told us that it is the model God provided for leading His Church (Ephesians 4:11-16).





- Obsession with the power of one's position will inevitably hurt the church.
- Superman and Wonder-woman type of leaders are not best for the church.
- No one possesses every gift, and all gifts are needed "to equip God's people to do His work and build up the church, the body of Christ." (Eph. 4:12 *NLT*).



To lead effectively, it's imperative to

- ***Know the teachings*** and practices of the Adventist church -- know the Church Manual.
- ***Be an example***: "All officers shall set an example in the matter of returning a faithful tithe to the Church. Anyone who fails to set such an example shall not be elected to church office" (Manual, Chap. 1, p. 72).
- ***Promote*** the study of the Bible, Prayer, tithing, relationship with Jesus, etc.

- ***Support all areas of the Church:*** Departments, activities, conference and world church programs, etc. (Manual, Chap. 1.)
- **Be confidential.**
- **Learn** from your fellow elders, pastor, and others.
- **Visit** the members and non-members.
- **Preach** sound doctrine.
- Evangelize/Grow the church.
- **Serve.**



## LEAVE A LEGACY

- The best leaders leave their footprints for others to follow.
- Let the impact of your service outlive your length of service.
- How would you want to be remembered as an elder?



# CONCLUSION

- “The elders who lead well are considered worthy of double honor.” 1 timothy 5:17.
- The Church will honor/recognize you; and remember you with respect.
- God will honor you now, and when Jesus returns.
  - ❖ A crown of glory awaits you. **1 Peter 5:4**

