

ELDERSHIP *at the*
LORD'S TABLE

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Introduction

Throughout the history of the fellowship that has come to call itself the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), many a book or pamphlet on the role and ministry of the elder have been written. Some books focus on the history of eldership within the New Testament or our denomination. Others focus on the role of elder as minister. Still others focus exclusively on the provision of sample elders' prayers at the Lord's Table. While this proliferation of resources points to the importance of elders within the church, it also begs the question: Why write yet another resource for elders?

The question, however simple, is a good one. Amidst all of the collective wisdom passed down throughout the history of our denomination, would it not be presumptuous to think that elders need something more to better inform their particular ministry? It might very well be so, and yet I firmly believe that our elders do indeed need more to aid them in their service—particularly their service at the Table. The primary reason for this has everything to do with context.

The development of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), as with any other movement, has shifted and changed with each generation of its members.

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Although more of this will be examined later in this document, it is safe to say that some aspects of the tradition have carried over through each passing of the torch, while the actual course of the race has brought changes in both belief and practice among the runners. As each generation of Disciples finds themselves in new terrain—hills of new growth, plains of institutional stability, swamplands of cultural battle, and mountains of change—the roles of ministers both lay and ordained have changed. This reality points to the purpose of this pamphlet: to provide Disciples elders of the early twenty-first century with a resource that specifically addresses the role of the elder at the Lord's Table while taking into account our history as a people, our current realities as a church, and our future as a witness of God's grace in the world.

Our fellowship, in the grand scheme of Christian history, is young. And yet, in our short lifetime as a particular people of faith, we have made many contributions to the life of the church universal. Whether large or small, the contributions and achievements of individual Disciples have nearly always been rooted in the experience of the local congregation. Every Hamm, Kinnamon, Jackson, or Watkins started off praising God and learning the meaning(s) of discipleship within a particular church home—this very practical reality points directly to the importance of eldership as ministry in the church.¹ Our corporate

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witness in the world begins at home. With this thought in mind, I humbly offer up my musings on the role of the Disciples elder at the Lord's Table.

This document can be used in a number of ways. A congregational board of elders may opt to read this work in its entirety over the course of a multiple-week study group. Individual elders may decide to read this booklet as a part of their own personal regimen of study, meditation, and Bible reading. Elders may also choose to peruse the sections of this work that give examples of elders' prayers as they prepare for their service at the Lord's Table. Finally (though not exhaustively), those who have been called to the ministry of eldership may choose to examine the list of resources for elders that can be found at the end of this document so that the wisdom of other Disciples may inform their own ministry to the church. My greatest hope and prayer is that some portion of this resource will be helpful to those men and women who have been called forth to lead and guide this generation of Disciples.