

Dear holy brethren and members of the Westminster Reformed Church.

Re: Appointment of leaders, Westminster Reformed Church

Greetings in the Lord's precious name. Bear with me as I speak with trepidation on a weighty matter.

The time has come in the life and history of our church to nominate and ordain leaders. Hitherto I believe these leaders have functioned in our midst but without any specific designation and special honour accorded them duly. They have worked as Christ's servants with joy and humility and love without due recognition.

But it is the Scriptural way to attribute offices to them either as deacons or elders. And therefore it is incumbent upon us to appoint them and honour them with the privileges of the offices.

Firstly, our congregational way of appreciating ecclesiastical polity upholds the principle of suffrage (Acts 6:3~6, 14:21~23). And in this sense I believe especially through preaching, counselling and spiritual building up, through the course of my pastoral ministry for a span of more than fourteen years, most of you have come to possess a measure of spiritual maturity and integrity to exercise your democratic prerogatives for the benefit of the church.

The democratic process works on the principle: "we reap what we have sown". If we exercise this holy prerogative without the fear of God then I say we make a travesty of holy things. The consequence, needless to say, will be devastating. The church is the pillar and ground of truth (I Timothy 3:15). Those who are elected to be its leaders must take responsibility to guard the sanctum and purity of the church. Hence prospective leaders should exhibit a fierce zeal and holy jealousy for the glory of God and the prosperity of the Gospel and the spiritual health and well-being of God's people. As leaders they are expected not just to serve but more vitally, to show steadfast allegiance to the Blessed Godhead, even God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ and the Eternal Spirit. They are sentinels in the house of God to guard anything that will damage God's Name and ward off any kind of encroachment of sin.

As to their qualifications, the Scriptures has granted us crystal clear instructions on this matter especially in Paul's pastoral epistles, namely, I Timothy and Titus. I have often preached on this theme and other issues closely related to it. We cannot speak elaborately on these things here because of the limitation imposed in the scope hereof. Let your leaders be proven men. Let their records speak for themselves. The apostle warns us against appointing novices. Christian character, not appearance, nor talents nor worldly attainments, should be the fundamental consideration in this critical exercise. Of course, the ability to lead will further enhance the prospect of one's candidacy. It goes without saying they must be sound in Christian doctrine and single-minded about the practical application of it in all spheres of life.

In reality, it is God Who has raised up these leaders. Our task remains to identify this special work of grace in them and ordain them to their offices in a solemn manner. This primarily involves preventing those who are not qualified from usurping these holy offices. An unqualified man in the holy offices can cause much irreparable damage and harm to the church. Hence it will go a long way if we could prohibit those who have spiritual flaws and blemishes from holding the reins in the governing of the local church. The devil and his cohorts find unconsecrated and inconsistent leaders as their favourite launching pads to destroy and ruin the work of God in the churches. On the other hand the positive aspect of our task remains in endorsing those whose life, faith and zeal mark them out for leadership roles. We then commend them to God for His mercy and blessing to authorise and sanctify them to become officers of Christ.

We ought to take heed in knowing that our choice would go a long way in affecting the way the church is governed. Leaders are appointed for a life-long span. Even though there are provisions wherein the church may prosecute disciplinary measures against an erring leader, the damage sustained could be substantial. Worse, it may also be irremediable.

I would therefore adjure you to be most solemn and scrupulous in undertaking this matter. It requires deep contemplation. It calls for prayer and fasting (Acts 14:21~23; Luke 6:12). Let your conscience be sanctified and let your choice be the outcome of your conviction. If you are not sure of any potential candidate, then refrain from commending him, lest you be found guilty of selecting arbitrarily or randomly. Our votes should reflect the testimony of our illumined conscience as well as the attestation of the Spirit of God within our hearts. It involves the exercise of all our reasoning faculties as we prayerfully apply them to the principles stipulated by the Word of God in this most crucial matter (Exodus 18:13~26; Numbers 11:16; I Timothy 3:1~13; Titus 1:7~9; Acts 6:3,5,6; Acts 14:21~23). We must not choose those whom we are not sufficiently acquainted with because such are "novices" unto us. On the other hand, failure to approve those whom God has disclosed to us with adequate corroboration concerning their rectitude and calibre imputes us of the sin of omission. By this sin we deprive ourselves and rob the church of her blessings. We also deny the work of God in nurturing leaders. The atrocity of this wrong cannot be over-emphasized. We ought to be thankful that most of us have enjoyed the luxury of enough time to ensure a good judgment in this exercise.

Wherefore I pray that you would be judicious and conscientious in discharging your responsibility in this very solemn task.

I trust that the will of God in this matter will prevail even as we practise suffrage.

Yours in the fear of God and the love of Zion,
Elijah Thomas Chacko
Pastor, Westminster Reformed Church
24 November 1998