

## ELDERSHIP

Eldership is a gift of the Spirit, in our midst. Elders need to recognize that they have been given that gift, which is both a cause for rejoicing and a cause for faithful exercise. Eldership is not a practice that can be rightly done in one's own strength. This must be done under the hand of the Lord, Who will provide both the direction and the strength.

Prayerful concern for the spiritual life of the meeting and gentle encouragement and guidance for those who offer vocal ministry are special fields of service for elders. In some cases these qualities may be found in a younger member, as age is not the sole determinant of discernment. Perhaps we have too long thought of the station of elder as one who cautions or reprimands the members for wrong doing. However important that aspect of eldership is, there is so much more to this gift than that. Encouragement is often imperative to the discouraged, as well as to the one who has made a right step forward. Sharing past experiences may help the traveler along the way in his or her spiritual life.

Elders are discerners of character and motives. They can separate right from wrong, truth from untruth. Elders need to be tactful, to be cheerful and not severe, to be trustworthy, to be calm in the midst of a spiritual tempest. Elders grow to have a large reserve of wisdom from which to draw. Elders need to be constantly watchful over themselves, that their own agendas not interfere with their calling, yet they must be diligent for right gospel order. They need to be supportive of those who are spiritually struggling.

It would be best for elders to live among the community of believers, attending its meetings and remaining aware of what is happening among the people on an everyday basis. Elders need contact with others called to that office, both in their own monthly meeting and in the quarterly and yearly meeting. Younger elders learn from older elders, just by being together.

Elders should be prayerful. They should read the Bible and other spiritually helpful writings regularly, for they never know the hour when their office will be called forth. Writings of early Friends are often helpful, for even though those writers lived in a different time from us, spiritual struggles of right and wrong remain the same. There may be times when an elder will suffer as the result of following the Lord's will in the office, but we encourage elders to press ahead as they are led.

As elders must be willing to exercise their gift when it is given, so also must they be willing to yield it up when circumstances or ability make it impossible for them to continue to serve in the office. Elders need the prayers of the meeting that they may be guided by the Lord in all their work.