

Elder accountability statement

The task of an elder/overseer is a noble task (1 Tim 3:1). The New Testament provides a list of qualifications for elders (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:6-9) and states that those who teach will be held to a higher standard (Jam 3:1). As an elder, I agree to hold my life accountable to the eldership and the members of Pinelands Baptist Church. While I rely on God's grace to sustain me, I recognise that I am not beyond the temptation to fail in ways that could constitute serious misconduct. I understand that God will hold me to a higher standard of conduct as my actions could have serious implications for the church body and the reputation of Christ in our world. I agree to follow the elder accountability policy and I commit to a path of restoration back into community within PBC should I become guilty of serious misconduct.

Elder accountability policy

1. Accountability in my personal life and ministry

I agree to connect regularly with at least one person to whom I agree to be accountable for my ongoing walk with Jesus, my relationships, ministry and areas of temptation/weakness which I inevitably experience as a human being seeking to follow Jesus. If I do not have such a person available, I will seek out another elder or pastor who can fill this role in my life. I recognise that being proactive in safeguarding my life, relationships, integrity and ministry will make me more likely to lead a God honouring life, thus avoiding serious sin and misconduct.

2. Appropriate disclosure

Notwithstanding the grace of God that covers all my sin, should I fail in my efforts to lead a God-honouring life, I agree to fully disclose to the whole eldership anything that could be considered serious misconduct that may disqualify me from holding an eldership position at Pinelands Baptist Church.

3. Accusations against individual elders/pastors/ministers

3.1 Lines of reporting

There may be times when individuals make serious allegations against elders, pastors or other church ministers. If at all possible, the individual should first discuss the matter with the accused person, followed the process in Matthew 18:15-17. If this is not possible (because of the serious nature of the offence, or if the elder fails to listen to the offended party) the point of contact for such an allegation would normally be the Church Secretary (unless the allegation involves the Secretary). The approach to the Secretary should be as direct as practically possible, although individuals are advised to take along another person for support where necessary. If the Secretary is unavailable, the individual should approach another elder.

3.2 Investigating allegations

Allegations will be investigated by the eldership without partiality (1 Tim 5:21). There should be two or more witnesses to the misconduct (1 Tim 5:19) unless the nature of the misconduct

makes this impossible, such as a private sin or a sexual assault accusation. The accused elder is required to make a full disclosure of events. There may be times when the offended person or the witness feel too intimidated or traumatised to meet with the full eldership. In such cases, a sub-committee of the eldership will meet with the people concerned and fully investigate the matter. Statements should be taken, in writing, by at least one of the elders who will then in turn convey this to the rest of the eldership.

If the accusation is of a criminal nature, the elders will conduct an internal investigation as above, but the eldership shall bring the accusation to SAPS immediately upon being made aware of the credibility of the accusation (within 24 hours). If further evidence or investigation is required to be collected by SAPS, the eldership shall support SAPS where legally possible.

3.3 Consequences of misconduct

If the accused elder makes full disclosure and confesses, the elder will be required to enter a restoration process, usually with a subset of the eldership. This may include (when applicable) confession, repentance and reconciliation with those sinned against. This may also include external counselling where appropriate. If the eldership judge that the nature of the sin constitutes serious misconduct, the elder will be requested to immediately resign from the eldership and this will be reported to the next church members meeting as a resignation due to serious misconduct on the part of the elder. Details of the misconduct will not be fully disclosed unless there are compelling reasons for doing so (such as the public nature of the offence). If the eldership does not see the offence as serious misconduct, the steps of confession, repentance and reconciliation are still followed, but the elder will not be asked to resign. Should the elder still choose to resign, the misconduct (not judged to be serious) will not be reported to the church members as the reason for the resignation.

If the elder contests the accusation but the allegation, after investigation, is upheld by the eldership, and the eldership (by unanimous agreement, barring the accused elder) believe the misconduct is serious in nature, the eldership will recommend the removal of the elder at the next members meeting. The details of the elder's investigation will be fully reported to the members (1 Tim 5:20). The exception to this process would be when the disclosure at the members meeting would harm the other parties involved (if applicable) in which case every effort should be made to protect their identity and reputation (particularly in the case of sexual assault or similar crimes). The members in meeting will decide if the allegation is upheld and whether it constitutes serious misconduct, and subsequently vote on whether to remove the accused from eldership. The procedures in the constitution and regulations shall be followed. The minutes of the members meeting may be disclosed to external church leaders upon request.

4. Confession of sin without external accusation

Following the accountability agreement, it is foreseen that an elder may confess to misconduct without the necessity of an accusation from the outside (for example, personal sin). Full disclosure to the eldership of the nature and circumstances of the sin are required. It may be

necessary, in the judgement of the eldership, to conduct a full investigation of the misconduct (depending upon its nature). The elder will commit to a path of restoration back into community. This may include reconciliation with those sinned against. The disclosure process outlined above will be followed if the nature of the sin constitutes serious misconduct. It is also possible that the elder may not be guilty of serious misconduct (has a sensitive conscience) and the elders commit to dealing sensitively and fairly with each other when this is the case.