

FAQ on RCCA Eldership

September 19, 2021

NOTES: Questions are organized in 3 parts:

- 1) Justification of church eldership in RCCA
- 2) The current Process of electing multiple elders
- 3) The future direction of RCCA eldership

Part 1. Justification of church eldership in RCCA:

1) What is the biblical basis of church eldership?

Elders are mentioned in many New Testament passages, and it's clear that they played significant leadership roles in early Christian church. Acts 11:30 tells us that gifts collected by Antioch church to help those in need was sent to "the elders" in Jerusalem church. The narration of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 demonstrates that the elders led church and made important decisions with the Apostles (Acts 15:2-6; 15:22-23). Subsequently, elders and apostles are mentioned together to represent the authority in Christian church (Acts 16:4; 21:18). Throughout his ministry, Paul and coworkers appointed elders in every newly established church (Acts 14:23), a strategy that was reflected in his instruction to Titus to appoint qualified brothers as Elders (Titus 1:5-9). He also instructed Timothy to do the same, even though the term "overseer" was used instead of "elder". Elders and overseers are two different words for the same office since key qualifications for overseers (1 Timothy 3:1-7) were the same as those for elders (Titus 1:1-5). Before going back to Jerusalem, Paul spoke directly to the elders of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17) and warned them to "be on guard for themselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood" (Acts 20:28), highlighting the importance of elders in leading the church. Similarly, the Apostle Peter considered himself an elder and exhorted fellow elders to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you" (1 Peter 5:2).

2) What are the responsibilities of an elder?

From the By-Laws of Rock Chinese Church of Austin Version 2012; Section E. ELDERS 1. Responsibilities:

- A. *Shepherd the flock (Acts 20:28, Jas. 5:14, I Pet. 5:1-3).*
- B. *Lead through example (I Pet. 5:3).*
- C. *Teach biblical truths (I Tim. 3:5, Tit. 1:9).*
- D. *Conduct Church Discipline (Mt 18:15-17)*
- E. *Provide direction for the church (I Tim 5:17)*

3) What are the biblical qualifications for an elder?

From the By-Laws of Rock Chinese Church of Austin Version 2012; Section E. ELDERS 2. Formation

- A. *Ordained Pastors are Elders*
- B. *Lay Elder nominees have to be active church members and meet the qualifications in I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.*

4) Is a sister qualified to be an elder?

At RCCA, we follow ACC, the planting church's theological position, that only men are qualified for eldership. However, women are qualified for Deaconship on the Church Council as well as other teaching positions.

5) Is there age and/or term limit for elders?

From the By-Laws of Rock Chinese Church of Austin Version 2012; Section E. ELDERS 3. Term: *Lay Elders are elected for a 3-year term and may be re-elected for a second 3-year term. Afterwards a lapse of one year is required before re-nomination.* Therefore, there is no age limit for eldership. However, in accordance with the Church by-laws under membership, the minimum age limit is 18 years old. We cannot and should not discriminate based on age but in the intent and respect of the major responsibilities of the position as an elder, the candidate should have life experience, spiritual wisdom, deep theological understanding, and a clear calling.

6) What is the difference in functions of elder vs deacon?

Elders will carry a heavier responsibility and burden in helping lead the church regards to spiritual wisdom, theological discernment, spiritual authority, and making sure RCCA stays on task with administration tasks and teaching tasks. Deacons will focus more on executing tasks and "serving" (based on diakonos in Greek which we translate in English to 'deacon' or 'servant') within the church that help grow the Body and spread the Gospel of Jesus.

7) Who will be the members in the Elder Board?

The Elder Board members will consist of all elected Elders during the term and one Pastor/ Minister from each congregation.

Part 2. The current Process of electing multiple elders:

1) A.) Why should we elect elders at this time?

In majority of biblical references, the word for "elders" is plural and word for church is singular, suggesting that the pattern in the early church was for a plurality of elders to lead in each local church. Leadership by elders provides the much-needed accountability and stability for the overall ministry of a church and continuity, especially when a pastor/minister leaves the church. For past years, RCCA has been practicing church eldership, yet with only one elder. As we will soon enter the 15th year of ministry together and will move to our new church building, we are praying that God will continue to guide our church to grow. Thus, electing elders is both for the continuity of past church practice and for the preparation of further church growth and development.

Both Elder Mayseng and Auntie May have faithfully served RCCA for the past 15 years and prior during the church planting preparation stages. Understandably, he would like to spend more time with his children and grandchildren, and this will necessitate more elders (plural) to help cast vision, local availability, and help lead the RCCA Co-Workers.

1. B.) Why did we not elect more elders from 2007-2021?

First, in simplicity and in transparency, RCCA did not grow numerically at the pace that we wanted and as such, we have remained a small church. In fact, in some ways, we have shrunk. However, over the past 14 years, we have seen some key leaders deepen in their faith, grow in spiritual maturity, and we are sensing from God that this could be a key time to appoint more elders. In order for RCCA to grow, we will need to see a continuity in leadership in harmony with both Church Council (Deacons) and establishing a broader Elder Board. Second, our emphasis over the past 14 years, as a non-denominational church which has a flatter church structure compared to other denominations, RCCA's emphasis has been on a flatter teamwork approach. Our planting church, ACC, had a similar history trajectory with introducing a team of elders at a later stage after the church had been established.

2) When will elder candidates be nominated? Who can nominate?

RCCA bylaw states: *"by Ordained Pastors and Lay Elders."* Currently, we do not have a full Elder Board, so for the transition to establish an Elder Board, the Church Council has been tasked with nominating the first-time elder candidates. Nominees must be approved by the Church Council by three-quarters majority and confirmed by the General Assembly.

3) What if I have unresolved issues with an elder candidate?

We realize that some relational conflicts take time to resolve. Whether a person is an elder candidate or not, we recommend that we should seek to be right with others before we come to the Lord's Supper, which RCCA does monthly, and ideally, we should seek to be right with others each day. Taking these timelines together, we are saying that God wants us to be reconciled with one another before we worship Him, otherwise we become religious hypocrites. Second, we want to emphasize that your opinion and your hurts matter, and it is important that BOTH sides get to hear each other out and have a chance to present a solution to the problem that has transpired. Step 1: Set up a meeting and try talking to the individual or elder candidate. Since our elder candidates are male, if you are female, please bring a neutral friend to help listen at the meeting. Step 2: If there is no reconciliation after the initial meeting, we then welcome you to bring your concern to the Elder Nomination Committee who will talk to both parties to see if the elder candidate is qualified or disqualified from the position.

4) When will new elders start their term?

Ideally January 1, 2022.

5) I don't know anything about eldership. Can more information be shared?

Yes. In addition to this FAQ, the church bylaw contains information on the responsibility, qualification, and term for elders. Two sermons have also been preached, one on July 25 on the biblical foundation of church eldership, and the other on August 8, on the qualifications for elders. If you missed either or both of those sermons, you could listen to them through church webpage under "Sunday Sermons".

6) Will there be an opportunity to ask questions not answered on this FAQ list?

Yes. Please submit your written questions to mayseng@gmail.com.

Part 3. The future direction of RCCA eldership:

1) How many elders do we need to form the elder board?

Ideally 3 or more so that a majority of the Elder Board can be achieved. The Elder Board will strive for unanimity in decision making but realistically, a majority decision is better represented and achieved by more elders.

2) If no elder board, how will elders work with deacons and pastors/ministers?

If this were the case that it is not a plurality of elders establishing an Elder Board, then things would continue with the Church Council serving over top of the congregation. The church governance as per the RCCA By-Laws would remain the same whether or not there is one, two, five, or zero elders. In terms of church governance that RCCA is a non-denominational church, so we are not fully: 1. Episcopal with varying church authorities over Board over Congregation. 2. Presbyterian with Elder over Clergy over Board over Congregation. 3. Congregation over Board over Clergy. The direction is that RCCA will be two Boards, that is Elder Board and Church Council of Deacons, BOTH serving the Congregation.

3) How will elder board work with deacon board, church council, and pastors/ministers?

As stated above?], the direction is that RCCA will be two Boards, that is Elder Board and Church Council of Deacons, BOTH serving the Congregation. Elder Board will work on big vision, macro ideas, church direction, and growth strategies for RCCA. The Church Council Board will be executing those tasks.

4) What if an elder become unqualified during his term?

From the By-Laws of Rock Chinese Church of Austin Version 2012; Section E. ELDERS 3. Term: In the event that an Elder is conducting himself in a manner warranting of dismissal, the Church Council may decide to discontinue his term.

關於磐石教會長老制的常見問題及回答

September 19, 2021

請留意：所有問題按內容分為 3 部分

- 1) 磐石教會實行長老制的理由
- 2) 此次增選長老的程序
- 3) 磐石教會長老制的未來方向

第 1 部分：磐石教會實行長老制的理由

1) 教會實行長老制的聖經基礎是什麼？

「長老」在新約多處經文中被提及，也很明顯地看到他們在初代教會中的重要領袖地位。使徒行傳 11:30 說到安提阿教會將所收集的，給有需要的耶路撒冷聖徒的捐項「送到了長老那裡」。使徒行傳 15 章記載了耶路撒冷大會的進行，證明重要的決定是由長老們和使徒們共同作出(如 15:2-6 節和 15:22-23 節)。此後，長老們和使徒們在代表基督教會的權柄時常被同時提及(使徒行傳 16:4 和 21:18)。貫穿保羅的選教事工中，他和同工們總在新建立的教會中設立長老(使徒行傳 14:23)。這一策略也反映在他吩咐提多設立夠資格的弟兄為教會長老(提多書 1:5-9)。他也同樣指示提摩太如此做，雖然所使用的詞是「監督」而不是「長老」。其實，長老和監督乃是同一職份的不同稱呼，因為監督的資格(提摩太前書 3:1-7)和長老的資格(提多書 1:5-9)是相同的。保羅在回耶路撒冷前和以弗所教會的長老見面(使徒行傳 20:17)，並且警告他們「聖靈立你們作全群的監督，你們就當為自己謹慎，也為全群謹慎，牧養神的教會，就是他用自己血所買來的」(使徒行傳 20:28)，突顯了長老們在教會帶領中的重要性。與此類似的，使徒彼得將自己視為長老中的一員，並勸勉和他同作長老的「務要牧養在你們中間神的群羊」(彼得前書 5:2)。

2) 長老的職責有哪些？

根據奧斯汀磐石教會規章(2012 版)第三章「組織」之第五條「長老」，長老的職責為：

1. 牧養教會(徒 20:28, 雅 5:14, 彼前 5:1-3)。
2. 作屬靈榜樣(彼前 5:3)。
3. 教導與傳講聖經真理(提前 3:2, 多 1:9)。
4. 執行教會紀律(太 18:15-17)
5. 帶領教會方向(提前 5:17)

3) 基於聖經的長老資格有哪些？

根據奧斯汀磐石教會規章(2012 版)第三章「組織」之第五條「長老」，長老的產生為：

1. 本會牧師自動成為長老。
2. 長老必須為本會之會友，且符合提前 3:1-7 及多 1:5-9 之資格。
3. 長老由提名委員會提名，經長執會四分之三通過，並經會友大會通過產生。

4) 姐妹是否能成為長老？

奧斯汀磐石教會和奧斯汀華人教會(植堂前的母堂)在這方面持同樣的神學立場，即只有弟兄能成為長老。但姐妹們可以成為執事而參與長執會的服事，也可擔負其他教導的服事。

5) 長老有年齡和任期的限制嗎？

根據奧斯汀磐石教會規章(2012 版)第三章「組織」之第五條「長老」，長老的任期規定是：長老之任期為三年，連選得連任一次，其後須停任至少一年才能被再度提名。因此，長老沒有年齡的限制；但根據教會規章關於會員的相關條款(凡滿十八歲之會員有選舉，被選舉及表決權)，必須年滿十八歲。我們不會也不應該基於年齡而有任何歧視，但考慮到長老這一職份的重大責任，候選人應該有足夠的生活閱歷，屬靈智慧，神學裝備，以及明確的呼召。

6) 長老和執事的功能有什麼不同？

長老們將在以屬靈的智慧，神學的洞察，以及屬靈的權柄來帶領教會上擔負更重的職責，以確保磐石教會在行政管理和教導上的正常進行。執事們更多關注事工的執行，以及在教會的「服事」(希臘文中「執事」這個詞可以翻譯為「執事」或「服事的人」)，以幫助教會作為基督身體的成長以及福音的傳揚。

7) 長老團將包括那些成員？

長老團將由所有任期中的選立的長老們，以及中英文堂各一位牧師或傳道組成。

第 2 部分：此次增選長老的程序

1) A.) 為什麼要增選長老？

聖經中提到「長老」時，絕大多數時候用的是複數，而提到「教會」則是單數。這表明，初代教會的做法是由多位長老帶領一個地方教會。由長老們帶領使得教會在事工進行上有必需的執行力和穩定性，當牧師/傳道人離開教會的時候也能保證教會帶領上的延續性。過去這些年磐石教會雖然有長老制，卻只有一位長老。在即將進入植堂後的第 15 年，也即將搬入新堂之際，我們祈求神繼續帶領教會的成長。因此，增選長老不但是過去教會實踐的繼續，也是未來教會成長髮展的預備。

1) B.) 為什麼我們過去沒有選立更多長老？

首先，簡單而坦率地說，磐石教會沒有如我們所期望的有人數上的增長。所以，我們仍是一個小教會。事實上，從某些方面看，我們甚至縮小了。然而，過去的 14 年中，我們也看到教會有些領袖信心有增長，屬靈更成熟，因此我們認為這是選立更多領袖的關鍵時機。磐石教會要成長，就需要建立長老團，使得領袖團隊更有延續性，也與長執會能更和諧地同工。其次，過去的 14 年中，作為非宗派的教會，我們強調的是更扁平的組織結構。我們的母堂，奧斯汀磐石教會，走過的軌跡類似，也是在教會發展到一定時期後開始選立多位長老。

2) 長老候選人提名什麼時候開始？如何提名？

磐石教會的規章關於長老提名：由牧師(們)和所有長老共同提名。目前我們沒有長老團，所以在成立長老團的這個過渡時期，教會長執會負責長老候選人的提名。被提名的必須有長執會以 3/4 批准通過，再由會員大會確認。

3) 如果我與某位長老候選人有尚未解決的問題，該怎麼辦？

我們理解關係上的衝突需要時間解決。無論與你有衝突的是否長老候選人，我們建議你們在每月主餐前先解決。理想情況下，我們希望每天都能解決與別人的衝突。因為，神喜悅我們在敬拜之前先彼此和好，否則，就是假冒為善。其次，我們認同你的意見和感覺很重要，但雙方能彼此傾聽很重要，也能因此而對所發生的問題找出解決辦法。第 1 步，安排一次與對方/長老候選人的見面。因為長老候選人是弟兄，若你是姐妹，請找一位朋友與會。第 2 步，如果第 1 次的會面沒有促成和解，我們歡迎你將你的事情帶到長老提名委員會(長執會)。長執會將聽取雙方的陳述，以確定該長老候選人是否合格。

4) 新增選的長老任期從什麼時候開始？

理想狀況下，從 2022 年 1 月 1 日開始。

5) 我對長老制沒有什麼瞭解。是否還有其他資訊可以分享？

有的。除了這個「常見問題及回答」外，教會規章中有關於長老職責，資格，任期的條款。此外，最近有過兩次與長老制相關的主日信息，即 7 月 25 日黃德牧師關於長老制的聖經基礎的信息，以及 8 月 8 日鄧明奇傳道關於長老資格的信息。若你錯過，可在教會網頁上的「主日信息」下找到並播放錄音。

6) 我是否有機會提出不在這個「問答單」上的問題？

是的。請將你的問題以電郵方式發給馮梅生長老，他的郵箱是：mayseng@gmail.com。

第 3 部分：磐石教會長老制的未來方向

1) 成立長老團需要有幾位長老？

理想情況下，至少 3 位，這樣長老團能夠建立多數制。長老團在作任何決定前將致力於尋求合一，但從務實的角度考慮，有更多長老參與下的多數制更好。

2) 如果沒有長老團，長老們將如何與執事們以及牧師們/傳道們同工？

如果沒有多位長老，也沒有長老團，教會長執會將繼續行使治理教會的功能。根據教會的規章，教會的治理模式將保持不變，無論是沒有長老，有一位長老，還是多位長老。奧斯汀磐石教會作為非宗派的教會，在治理上不會完全是下面幾種模式：1. Episcopal with varying church authorities over Board over Congregation. 主教制：有各種高於長老團和會員大會的機構。2. 長老制：長老們高於神職人員和會員大會。3. 會員大會高於長老團和神職人員。磐石教會的方向是將有長老團和長執會，兩者都為會員大會服務。

3) 長老團將如何與執事會，長執會，以及牧師們/傳道們同工？

如上所述，磐石教會的方向是將有長老團和長執會，兩者都為會員大會服務。長老團將注重磐石教會大的遠景，宏觀的想法，教會的發展方向，成長策略等；長執會則負責將那些付諸實施。

4) 如果長老在任期中被發現不合格，會怎樣處理？

根據奧斯汀磐石教會規章(2012 版)第三章「組織」之第五條「長老」；長老任期的規定為：長老之任期為三年，連選得連任一次，其後須停任至少一年才能被再度提名。如果某位長老在任期中因行為不端而不再合格，長執會可以中止其任期。