

Elder Norms



“Group rules” or norms are “the way we do things in our group.” Often they are unconscious, rarely discussed, seldom decided by discussion. Different people come from different families and those families have different rules. When people come together in a group, the different family rules may conflict. Family rules often become more important than the Bible – even in strong Christian groups. These norms are often elevated to God’s truth. They are not just the “way we did things in our family,” but that is the way things “ought to be done.”

Think about this new eldership. How would you like to function as an eldership? What does the Bible say? What guidelines would you like to have to carry out the work given to you by the Holy Spirit in the Bible?

- **THE FUNCTION OF ELDERS RULES**

What is our understanding, as a group, about the work of elders?

What is the difference in the work of elders and deacons?

How do our meetings and time spent in elder work reflect that?

- **SHEPHERDING RULES**

What are our rules for getting to know the sheep?

How do we care for the sheep?

How do we protect the sheep?

How do we guide the sheep into green pastures and still waters?

How do we shepherd each other? What is our plan to know each other, rejoice with each other, weep with each other, and care for each other?

- **DEACON RULES**

How much authority and responsibility is given to deacons?

How does this eldership handle the accountability of deacons? What happens when deacons don't deak?

How are deacons rewarded and encouraged for work well done?

- **OVERSEEING RULES**

How do we oversee, manage the congregation?

Do we oversee the congregation as a group of elders or do individual elders manage specific areas of the work of this congregation?

- **MINUTES RULES**

Who keeps minutes of the meetings?

How do you share the approved minutes?

What happens when you have a disagreement about what your discussion and decision was?

- **LEADERSHIP**

Who is the leader of our meetings?

Is it the same person each time?

Is the leadership rotated? If so, how is leadership rotated and how often?

- **QUORUM**

How many in the group must be present to make an “official” decision?

- **DECISIONS**

How does the group arrive at a group decision or a group solution to a problem?

- ▶ Majority
- ▶ Minority
- ▶ The first to speak
- ▶ The last to speak
- ▶ The oldest
- ▶ The youngest
- ▶ Other

- **ABSENCES**

When a person is going to be absent, how does the group learn this?

- **NUMBER SPEAKING**

How many speak at a time in meetings?

Does the group permit whispering and private conversations that the entire group cannot hear?

- **REPRESENTATION**

When I speak in a meeting, for whom am I speaking?

- ▶ Myself
- ▶ Myself and God
- ▶ Myself and my family
- ▶ Myself and a specified group
- ▶ Myself and “a bunch of others”
- ▶ Other

- **DISAGREEMENT**

Do we have a right to disagree with each other in our discussions?

When we disagree with each other in group meetings, do we speak with one voice to the congregation?

Who finds out about our disagreements?

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

- ▶ To whom do I speak about what is discussed and what is done in our meetings?
- ▶ Any and everyone
- ▶ My wife
- ▶ My wife and a few trusted friends
- ▶ One or two trusted friends
- ▶ No one

If I speak to someone else about what goes on in our meetings, to whom do I expect that person to share the information?

- ▶ Any and everyone
- ▶ His or her spouse
- ▶ His or her spouse and a few trusted friends
- ▶ One or two trusted friends
- ▶ No one

How do I get that agreement?

- **CONFLICT**

How do we handle conflict?

What is considered “fighting fair?”

What is considered “not fighting fair?”

With whom can I disagree?

With whom can I not disagree?

What topics cannot be discussed?

- **FEELINGS – SADNESS, JOY, FEAR, ANGER**

What feelings are acceptable to have and to express?

What feelings are unacceptable and are not to be discussed?

- **WORKING WITH STAFF**

How do you view staff?

- ▶ Team members that can listen, learn, teach, contribute—trained professionals who participate in thinking and planning for the church.
- ▶ Hired help that need to be supervised, watched, controlled—giving and withholding permission for requests.

How is that reflected by when you meet with them and what you do when you meet with them?

- **TRANSITION RULES**

What agreements do we have for smooth transitions when elders, deacons, and other leaders need to resign or move?

- **APPRECIATION RULES**

What policies and practices do we have to express gratitude to people when they are serving well and to show appreciation when they resign?

- **EMAIL, MESSAGE RULES**

- ▶ What communication will we be doing by email, message: factual (meeting places, times), decisions, conflict?
- ▶ Who will compose and send elder emails, messages?
- ▶ Who will read elder emails, messages (wife, children)?
- ▶ Who will have access to elder's emails?

- **OTHER RULES**

What other rules does our group have?

- **RULE VIOLATIONS**

How do we deal with rule violations?

- ▶ Ignore them
- ▶ Learn from them

- **CHANGE OF RULES**

Have we ever changed our rules?

What was the occasion for the change and how was it done?

How often will we evaluate our rules?