

How are elders and ministerial servants appointed in each congregation?

■ In the first century C.E., the apostle Paul told the elders who served in the congregation in Ephesus: “Pay attention to yourselves and to all the flock, among which *the holy spirit has appointed you* overseers, to shepherd the congregation of God, which he purchased with the blood of his own Son.” (Acts 20:28) What role does holy spirit play in the appointment of elders and ministerial servants today?

First, holy spirit moved the Bible writers to record the qualifications for elders and ministerial servants. Sixteen different requirements of elders are listed at 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Further qualifications are found in such scriptures as Titus 1: 5-9 and James 3:17, 18. Qualifications for ministerial servants are outlined at 1 Timothy 3:8-10, 12, 13. Second, those recommending and making such appointments specifically pray for Jehovah’s spirit to direct them as they review whether a brother meets the Scriptural requirements to a reasonable degree. Third, the individual being recommended needs to display the fruitage of God’s holy spirit in his own life. (Gal. 5:22, 23) So God’s spirit is involved in all aspects of the appointment process.

But who actually appoints such brothers? In the past, all recommendations involving the appointment of elders and ministerial servants were sent to the local branch office. There, brothers appointed by the Governing Body were assigned to review these recommendations and to make appropriate appointments. Next, the branch office would notify the body of elders. The elders, in turn, would inform the newly appointed men of their appointment, asking them if they were willing and actually qualified to accept the assignment. Finally, an announcement was made to the congregation.

But how were such appointments made in the first century? At times, the apostles made specific appointments, such as at the time they appointed seven men to care for the daily food distribution to widows. (Acts 6:1-6) However, those men may already have been serving as elders, that is, before being given this additional assignment.

Although the Scriptures do not explain in detail how every appointment was made back then, we do see some indication of how this was done. We are told that when Paul and Barnabas



Elders discuss a brother’s Scriptural qualifications with the circuit overseer (Malawi)

were on their way back home from their first missionary trip, “they appointed elders for them in each congregation, offering prayer with fasting, and they entrusted them to Jehovah, in whom they had become believers.” (Acts 14:23) Years later, Paul wrote to his traveling companion Titus, saying: “I left you in Crete so that you would correct the things that were defective and *make appointments of elders* in city after city, as I instructed you.” (Titus 1:5) Likewise, Timothy, who traveled extensively with the apostle Paul, appears to have been given similar authority. (1 Tim. 5:22) Clearly, then, these appointments were made by traveling overseers, not by the apostles and older men in Jerusalem.

With this Biblical precedent in mind, the Governing Body of Jehovah’s Witnesses has adjusted how the appointments of elders and ministerial servants are made. As of September 1, 2014, appointments are being made as follows: Each circuit overseer carefully reviews the recommendations being made in his circuit. During his visits to the congregations, he will try to get to know those who are recommended, working along with them in the ministry if at all possible. After discussing the recommendations with the local body of elders, the circuit overseer has the responsibility of appointing the elders and ministerial servants in the congregations in his circuit. In this way, the arrangement is closer to the first-century pattern.

Who handle the various roles in this process? As always, “the faithful and discreet slave” has the primary responsibility of feeding the domestics. (Matt. 24:45-47) This includes searching the Scriptures, with the help of the holy spirit, in order to provide direction on the practical application of Bible principles that have a bearing on the way the worldwide congregation is organized. The faithful slave also appoints all circuit overseers and Branch Committee members. In turn, each branch office provides practical assistance in implementing the direction given. Each body of elders has the solemn duty to review thor-

ROLES OF THOSE INVOLVED WITH APPOINTMENTS

GOVERNING BODY:

Gives direction on the practical application of Bible principles that have a bearing on the way the congregation is organized. Appoints circuit overseers and Branch Committee members.

BRANCH OFFICE:

Provides practical assistance in implementing the direction of the Governing Body.

BODY OF ELDERS:

Reviews thoroughly the Scriptural qualifications of the men it recommends for appointment.

CIRCUIT OVERSEER:

Carefully and prayerfully considers the recommendations made by the elders and then appoints the men who qualify.

BROTHERS RECOMMENDED:

Need to display the fruitage of the spirit and meet the Scriptural qualifications.

oroughly the Scriptural qualifications of the brothers they recommend for appointment in God’s congregation. Each circuit overseer has the serious responsibility to consider carefully and prayerfully the recommendations made by the elders and then to appoint the men who qualify.

When we understand how appointments are made, we appreciate more fully the role of holy spirit in this process. We then have greater confidence in and respect for those who have been appointed in the Christian congregation.—Heb. 13:7, 17.