Appointment of leaders in the church is no small matter. The Word of God has provided the church with divine instructions on this matter. So, only men of God’s choice should be appointed in the leadership of the church.

Only godly men can appropriately and effectively manage the ministries of the church. The church, being a spiritual body, can only be managed by men of high spiritual credentials. Let us take note that the qualifications for church leaders are not to be determined by any human entity or individual, because God has already stipulated them. Those who do not meet all of the qualifications required by God’s Word for Elders and Deacons should not come to these positions.

The need for biblically qualified people to come to serve in the offices of Elder and Deacon is urgent and great. However, we should not hurry and carelessly appoint people to the offices of the church. My prayerful opinion is that while we continue to have the services of the present Pastor, Elders and Deacons, we must earnestly pray for God’s leading concerning who should be appointed to these offices. The early church prayed to have both the discernment concerning God’s choice of men to the leadership and also their equipping done adequately.

Select Leaders with Much Prayer

The Apostle Peter and fellow apostles prayed for God’s leading in the appointment of a man to replace Judas. “And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” (Acts 1:24-25). The Scripture clearly records in another text that the prayers of the early church for godly men to lead the ministry were answered - “As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (Acts 13:2).

We need the help of the Holy Spirit in determining the right persons for the offices of the church. The Spirit knows every man’s heart. From the example of the anointing of David as King, we know that in the selection of leaders, God is interested in the spiritual condition of the heart, rather than outward
appearance. We read in 1 Samuel 16:7, “But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.” This is the reason why Peter and the rest of the Apostles prayed, “Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship.” If we have to have men of God’s choice in the leadership, we must sincerely seek His mind in prayer, even in fasting.

Another reason why we must pray in the selection of godly leaders is that it is the Spirit who equips men for the offices of the church. The Spirit is the giver of spiritual gifts that are necessary for the offices of the church. “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will” (1 Corinthians 12:11). So only the Spirit can show who are the men whom He hath equipped with the appropriate gifts for the edification of the church.

Even our Lord Jesus prayed all the night long, before He chose the apostles. “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles” (Luke 6:12, 13). So let us pray for godly leaders during our Prayer Meetings on Tuesday nights and in all other prayer gatherings. God’s will must be done in the appointment of church leaders. Like Moses, we must pray, “Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation” (Numbers 27:16).

Select Leaders by the Standards of God’s Word

In spite of the clear statements in the Scripture regarding the elders’ and deacons’ qualifications, people often take one of two extreme positions regarding their qualifications. The first is to ignore the full range of spiritual qualifications, thus permitting unqualified men to fill the roles of leadership. The other extreme is to add qualifications or restrictions that God doesn’t demand, thus excluding needed and qualified men from church leadership. Ultimately, such practices weaken and lower the congregation’s spiritual life; and also prevent the congregation from reaching its full potential.

The Apostle Paul outlined the spiritual qualifications for elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 with a specific purpose in his mind. This purpose is recorded in verses 14-15: “These things write I unto thee . . . . that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” From these words, it is clear God requires that only spiritually and morally qualified men are appointed to the leadership of the church that the spiritual atmosphere of the church might function as the pillar and ground of His truth.
Members of the church ought to consider the biblical guidelines for church leaders before indicating their support or rejection of a person to the leadership. So when it comes to the election of brethren to the office of Elder and Deacon, let our minds be fully saturated with Scriptural instructions on Church leadership that we may not give ourselves into principles and motives which are contradictory to God’s will. When all church members make their choices according to the Scriptural teaching, rather than individual preferences, the church will experience unity of mind in the election of its leadership. If every one of us is committed to all the Scriptural guidelines for Church leadership, there will not be any room for disagreement or disunity. Our commitment to God’s Word will enable us to have godly wisdom and judgment in our decision-making. “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Psalm 119:130).

The following procedure for the appointment of Elders and Deacons is prescribed in the constitution of Gethsemane B-P Church (and most of the Bible-Presbyterian churches in Singapore), which is an excellent guideline. These guidelines are according to the Biblical teaching on leadership. (For emphasis, some portions are printed in italics.)

Article 20.2 Candidates for election to Church Session shall satisfy the requirements listed in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1 and 1 Peter 5. In addition, to ensure better objectivity in selection, they shall fulfil the following conditions:

a. demonstrate beyond reasonable doubt and over a sufficient length of time that they are faithful and mature members of the Body of Christ and faithfully devote themselves to personal prayer and study of the Word;

b. attend public worship and prayer meetings of the Church regularly unless prevented from doing so for valid reasons;

c. make a careful study of the Constitution, in particular the Principle and Practice of Biblical Separation and fully accept it;

d. be willing to participate wholeheartedly in the ministry of the Church with the Pastor, and to devote time, talents and resources in such ministry which shall include serving in the various departments of the Church.

There are about 20 spiritual qualities mentioned in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, which must be found in everyone who comes to the eldership and deaconship of the church. We must not make any compromise on these requirements because men without these qualities cannot safeguard the purity and true spiritual maturity of the church.

While good leaders are essential to the progress of the ministry of the church, the appointment of bad leaders will be destructive to its spiritual progress and effective functioning. So let the church and its members prayerfully select their leaders according to the biblical guidelines.

We must see to it that His glory is the one sole object of all we do.
Charles Spurgeon