

MESSAGE TO ALL PRESBYTERS
By Warner Durnell, EP

Seated in the sanctuary of the Hillsboro Presbyterian Church on the occasion of the installation of a recently called and received colleague in ministry, I sat non-anxiously as a worshiper. I attended this service in order to show my support to a teaching elder who had just been welcomed into the work and witness of the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee.

As I gazed about the sanctuary I counted no fewer than a dozen other teaching elders, only three of which were actually on the Installation Commission. I thought to myself, "It sure is good seeing so many fellow Ministers present." This was a stark difference from the absence of very many teaching elders on such occasions since my return to the Presbytery of Middle Tennessee two and one-half years ago.

Sometimes I wonder if we teaching elders have lost sight of an important responsibility that we bear, that of "PRESBYTER." In The Book of Church Order (under which I was ordained a teaching elder) it states: *"This office (of the Minister of Word and Sacrament) is the first in the Church, both for dignity and usefulness.... As it is his/her duty to be serious and prudent and an example to the flock, and to govern well in the house and kingdom of Christ, he/she is termed Presbyter."* Although that title may not be in vogue quite as it once was, teaching elders still are *presbyters*, a member of a presbytery, which as the current Book of Order states, includes *"responsible participation in the deliberations, worship, and work of the presbytery."*

As a presbyter, a teaching elder is expected to not only faithfully carry out the duties of her or his particular validated ministry, but also to serve in the ministry of the presbytery to which she or he belongs. This duty on behalf of presbytery does not end with service on a particular unit or committee of presbytery, such as the Committee on Ministry or the Outreach Committee, but it also involves the following when called upon to:

- moderate a session or congregational meeting when permitted within the bounds of the presbytery
- lead worship and preach when invited to a congregation without a pastor or stated supply
- administer the Sacraments for a church when another teaching elder is unavailable
- be on-call to a session when a pastor or associate pastor is on personal leave, or vacation
- be present for ordination and installation services, as well as retirements and funeral observances
- serve as commissioners to Synod and General Assembly or unites of the same when chosen
- visit the sick and infirmed of those colleagues in one's neighborhood of the presbytery
- pray for fellow teaching elders, mindful also of those not presently serving in parish ministries

This is by no means an exhaustive list, but it does give one a glimpse of the things we can and should be found doing as teaching elders in living out our ordination vow to *"be a friend among your colleagues in ministry,"* and *"be active in government and discipline, serving in the councils of the church....."*