

Eldership at Centennial Church

Paul to the elders in Ephesus: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.”

Acts 20:28

October 20, 2014

Centennial Family,

In his October 19 sermon, Ross laid out the biblical teaching on church leadership, specifically regarding elders. Please listen to that message online if you missed it. The information below is additional help for your consideration as we move forward as a church family.

We are asking our members to simultaneously 1) vote to approve our updated bylaws which detail governance by elders and allow for the office of deacon, and 2) vote in affirmation of our lead pastor and three current Leadership Team members to be named as our first elders.

We believe this is an important step in moving us toward a more biblically faithful model of church leadership, so we are asking you to carefully and prayerfully approach these topics, and to please reach out to us if you have any questions or concerns.

Thank you,

CC Leadership Team

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1. How does the New Testament describe/prescribe church leadership?

First, the terms *elder*, *bishop*, and *pastor* seem to be used synonymously and interchangeably. This is seen most clearly in 1 Peter 5:1-7 and Acts 20:17-32. Peter told the “elders” (v.1) to “pastor/shepherd” the flock (v.2), acting also as overseers (v.2b). Each term emphasizes a various aspect of the leader’s role. Likewise, Paul used all three terms as he addressed the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:17, 28).

Second, leadership in the early church clearly seems to be plural. The emphasis is always upon a shared responsibility. There is no case of a monarchical or authoritarian leader who rules autonomously.

Acts 14:23

And when they had appointed *elders* for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

Acts 20:17

Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the *elders* of the church to come to him.

1 Timothy 4:14

Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the *council of elders* laid their hands on you.

1 Peter 5:1

So I exhort the *elders* among you, as a fellow elder...

James 5:14

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the *elders* of the church, and let them pray over him

Third, elders have multiple biblical responsibilities, but they seem to fall into three main categories:

a. Elders lead.

They “rule,” “manage” and exercise authority as servants under Christ. Their leadership models that of Jesus - with both strength and authority as well as humility and meekness.

1 Thessalonians 5:12

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who *labor* among you and *are over you in the Lord* and admonish you,

Acts 20:28

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers*, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

1 Peter 5:2

shepherd the flock of God that is among you, *exercising oversight*, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

b. Elders teach.

Teaching is the sole “task” or spiritual gift listed among all the character qualifications of 1 Timothy 3. Elders are to be men who know the Scriptures and can adequately handle them, teaching others and refuting error (Titus 1:9).

1 Timothy 3:2

Therefore an overseer must be... *able to teach*... Titus 1:9

He must *hold firm to the trustworthy word* as taught, so that he may be *able to give instruction in sound doctrine* and also *to rebuke* those who contradict it.

1 Timothy 5:17

Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.

c. Elders care.

Elders are pastors, shepherds, or care-givers. They pray for, counsel, encourage and admonish the sheep within their flock. They seek to both be known and know others.

James 5:14

Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and *let them pray* over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

Acts 20:28

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, *to care for the church of God*, which he obtained with his own blood.

1 Peter 5:2

shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

Hebrews 13:17

Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they *keep watch over your souls*, as those who will give an account.

2. What are the spiritual qualifications for elders?

The qualifications for elders are spelled out in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. The main idea is that elders are men who have evidenced Christlikeness and are recognized as godly examples in the community.

The traits that *all* Christians should aspire to are observable (though not perfectly) in the men who hold church offices.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

3. What are the differences between elders and deacons?

Deacons were selected as the need for more structure and leadership/management became apparent in the early church (Acts 6:1-7). Elders were appointed first (Acts 14:23) and deacons were named later (Phil 1:1). Deacon simply means "servant" and the function that they played in the earliest of the church's life was that of freeing the other leaders (elders, or apostles at that point) to focus on the ministry of spiritual needs (Acts 6:4). Though deacons are also required to be spiritually mature, their function seems primarily administrative while the elders' role is primarily pastoral.

4. What role will women play in the life of our church?

We believe that women play a critical role in the life, health, and growth of the church. In aspiring to be a biblically-balanced church, our desire is to maintain the traditional teaching of gender roles while acknowledging that grey areas do exist and not all practicalities are clearly addressed by the Scriptures. It is our conviction that the New Testament only restricts the role of women in the office of elder and/or as the primary preacher/teacher of the congregation. Women

should be encouraged to lead and serve within the church in all other ways, the office of elder solely excepted.

5. Why are we moving toward this type of leadership structure now?

We believe it is *biblical*. As stated above, we believe this model of church governance to most clearly approximate the leadership structure we read about in the Bible. Its emphasis on plurality, service, and spirituality is grounded in wisdom from God himself. These changes are an attempt to move our leadership structure to be less “corporate” and more “biblical.”

We believe it is *healthy*. Because it’s biblical, it is also healthy. There is little precedent for voting in the New Testament and churches that emphasize voting can tend to be divisive. Leaders that know and listen to the sheep, and know and listen to the Good Shepherd are best able to discern the will of God and the good of His sheep. Accountability within the elder board helps ensure that healthy dialogue and disagreement is present, even while dismissal of an elder is possible.

We believe it is *timely*. There is some ambiguity in our current bylaws about the role and powers of the board. Also, our current bylaws do not specify the role of deacon. As our church grows we want to allow our elders to stay focused upon their biblical functions and to be able to delegate other important tasks to qualified deacons and committees.

6. How will elders be selected?

We are asking the members of CC to affirm our new bylaws while simultaneously naming our current Leadership Team (board) as our first elders. All four men have been affirmed by our congregation in previous years. Now, we are asking the church to affirm them for the role of elder officially.

In the future, we hope to add additional elders (and deacons). Those new appointments will ultimately be made by the ruling elders with affirmation by the congregation. While the elders always want to hear

input and suggestions (nominations) from the congregation, we will not promote a process of formal nominations and/or popular vote.

Men who are identified as potential candidates will be informally and formally interviewed and “vetted” and the congregation will then be asked to bring forth any justifiable reason for disqualification within a reasonable timeframe. All elders will be expected to go through some pre-training prior to their appointment, as well as informal and formal ongoing training as an elder team.

7. How long will the elders serve in their role?

While some elder boards have rotations and terms built into the bylaws, we do not believe this is biblically necessitated or practically ideal. Admittedly, there is a danger of stagnancy on long-term boards but there is also a danger in excessive turnover. In consultation with other pastors, and our own experience, we believe that ideally an elder should remain in office as long as possible, until he resigns or becomes disqualified. A “sabbatical” can be taken for any elder as deemed necessary, however, even on sabbatical he remains a stated member of the elder board and is not withheld from voting.

8. How does our staff fall into the authority and responsibility of the church?

Staff are accountable to the elder board, reporting directly to the Lead Pastor. While the elders have the ultimate authority for the direction and health of the church, many of the day to day ministries and operations are delegated to the staff.

9. What role will the congregation play in selecting elders and in the overall direction of CC?

Our members will still be required to approve any and all changes to the church bylaws and affirm the annual budget. Additionally, any time an elder or deacon candidate is considered for office, there will be a period of “testing” in which the membership will be able to bring any legitimate reasons for the candidate’s disqualification. The elders will investigate any concerns and make a determination.

Though this form of church governance downplays democratic votes, it is not intended to stifle communication or participation. Communication should be bidirectional, and leaders should always be seeking the input and well-being of the flock.

10. When will this happen?

We will gather for a family meeting **October 26** at 6pm. More will be presented then and there will be a time for questions and interaction. We will ask CC members to vote on **Sunday, November 9** to adopt our newly drafted bylaws and affirm the appointment of the current Leadership Team (board) as elders.