

## **Biblical and Functional Eldership at Gospel Community Church**

*What is biblical eldership and how does it look at Gospel Community Church?* Many of our personal ideas about church leadership are shaped by our denominational background or by various cultural ideas about leadership (boards, committees, clubs, etc). At Gospel Community Church we respect how some denominations view church leadership, and ultimately we believe that the biblical definition of leadership is more important than our denominational or cultural definitions.

Our leadership team has taken great care to study what the Bible has to say about church leadership, namely – eldership, and we have also spent time examining how various churches define and structure their leadership teams. We believe that it's important to have a clear understanding of biblical leadership because healthy leaders will ultimately lead to a vibrant and healthy church. While we have strong convictions regarding biblical eldership, we do realize that functionally eldership will look different from church to church.

Regardless of whether you're simply examining Christianity, new to the faith, or you're an established Christian, we hope that this document gives you clear insight into our biblical convictions regarding eldership and our functional eldership structure.

### **Convictions regarding eldership:**

***1) The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is the supreme spiritual leader of the church; all human leaders are accountable to Him and responsible to represent Him (John 10:10; 1 Pet. 5:4; Heb. 13:17).***

At Gospel Community Church we refer to Jesus as the "Senior Pastor" of our church because the Bible refers to Jesus as the good shepherd and the chief shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4; John 10:10). Jesus is the ultimate supervisor and overseer of our souls (1 Pet. 1:4), so all of our church leaders, and the individual members of our congregation, are primarily accountable to Christ.

Heb. 13:17 says that the local church leaders are keeping watch over the souls that are entrusted to them and one day they will have to give an account. One of the primary responsibilities of biblical church leaders is to humbly submit themselves to Jesus, and then to clearly point people to him.

***2) In the New Testament the senior human leaders of the church are called elders (Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Pet. 5:1-4; Acts 20).***

In the first century, elders were appointed to lead churches and they were given specific instructions regarding church oversight. In the New Testament, the terms elder, bishop, and overseer are used interchangeably, and the primary function of this role was to "pastor" God's people.

In First Peter, elders are instructed to "shepherd the flock of God" (1 Pet. 5:1-4). The Greek word for "shepherd" is *poimano* (verb), which means to tend, feed, care, lead, guide, and protect. Our English word for "pastor" comes from the idea of shepherding.

In addition to being one of the functions of elders, the biblical term “pastor” seems to also represent a spiritual gift and not just a role (Eph. 4:11). The function of all elders is to help lead and teach God’s people, but some elders also pastor through non-teaching roles.

Peter stressed that elders are to pastor (lead) God’s church lovingly, willingly, and boldly. They are to do this for God’s glory and not for their own shameful gain. Elders should be an example to others and, like Christ, they should be willing to lay down their lives for the gospel and for the people they lead.

**3) Elders are set apart by God and appointed by godly (spiritually mature) leaders (Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23, 20:28).**

In Acts 20:28 it says, “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.”

God clearly sets leaders apart, and He is the one who gives some people pastoral gifts.

Even though God decides who becomes an overseer, God uses spiritually mature leaders to identify, train, and appoint leaders. When Titus was sent to the Island of Crete, his primary purpose was to organize the churches and appoint elders (Titus 1).

In Acts, Paul and Barnabas appointed elders after they planted churches: “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 14:23). It’s also important to note that whenever the Bible addresses elders, there is always a plurality of elders involved. This seems to be God’s way of protecting the church from any one elder who might abuse their authority.

The current elders at Gospel Community carefully and prayerfully evaluate men whom we believe might be set apart by God to lead as elders – and from time to time, the men who are qualified are invited to join the elder team.

**4) There is a high Biblical standard for elders (Titus 1:6-9; 1 Tim. 3:2-7).**

Being an elder (pastor) is not necessarily about someone’s age, experience, or educational credentials – it primarily has to do with calling, character, and spiritual maturity. The Bible gives us very clear spiritual and practical qualifications to help assess someone’s calling and ability to lead.

In First Timothy 3 and Titus 1, there are two lists that help us to discern whether someone is Biblically qualified to be an elder. These lists aren’t exactly the same, and they aren’t necessarily meant to be checklists, but they do give us a good idea of what we need to look for in elders.

It’s clear that no person can ultimately meet all of the qualifications, but God still sets a very high standard of holiness for church leaders. When Gospel Community Church looks for elders, we don’t look for perfect people, but we do look for people who are constantly in the pursuit of attaining the qualities that are described in Titus 1 and First Timothy 3. No one is perfect, but an elder should be a model of Christ-like character and spiritual maturity.

While some people have historically made a case for why women should serve in this role, at this point, our best understanding of the Scriptures is that this particular role is limited to biblically qualified men. We believe that if elders are leading well, and regularly listening to female voices in the church, then both men and women will flourish in various leadership and ministry roles. Our practice is to identify, develop, and ordain qualified men to serve in the role of elder, for the flourishing of the whole church family. We also strive to help the women in our church family to be heard and to shape our church by discovering, and using, their spiritual gifts in a variety of staff, and volunteer, leadership roles. *See: 1 Corinthians 12, Romans 12, Ephesians 4:11-13, 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6, 1 Peter 4:1-4.*

### **Eldership at Gospel Community:**

The **Collective Elder Team** works hand in hand to discern God's leading for GC and to serve the individual GC congregation. **The Collective Elder Team is mutually accountable and committed to prayer, to the ministry of the Word (Acts 6:4), and to equipping the saints (staff and congregation) for the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12).**

The **Lead Elders** serve as the Board of Directors of GC and provide oversight for the church at large, dealing with issues such as vision, mission, and primary direction.

The **Local Elders** are assigned spiritual oversight of a particular congregation (GCR or GCCH); they are responsible for advising and supporting the Lead Elders, and for the spiritual care of their particular congregation (GCR or GCCH).

This structure allows us: 1) to fulfill our civil (State Corporation Commission) and ecclesiastical (Biblical) obligations, 2) to swiftly and wisely address the administrative needs of the church, and 3) to effectively care for the spiritual needs of the church.

### **Duties:**

- a) Prayerfully pursue God and lead the church to faithfully accomplish the Great Commission (Acts 6:4, Matt. 28:19-20).
- b) Help to accomplish the specific vision and mission of GCC.
- c) Model Christ-likeness to the congregation.
- d) Shepherd the congregation (1 Pet. 5:2).
- e) Develop and disciple leaders.
- f) Serve the ministries of the church.
- g) Equip the body of Christ (staff/congregation) for the work of ministry (Eph. 4:12).

### ***Elder Covenant***

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand my role as a \_\_\_\_\_ Elder and the responsibilities that are assigned to me by Christ and my fellow elders. Without any hesitation, I commit to fulfilling my role to the best of my ability. I submit myself to Christ and to my fellow elders. I will cheerfully follow Christ, love my family, and serve my church. I will faithfully pursue humility and seek to lead in a way that glorifies Christ and benefits His church. I will not abuse my authority or neglect my responsibilities. *If at any point – I am no longer capable, or my fellow elders feel*

*that I am incapable of fulfilling my responsibilities – I will step down graciously, discreetly, and un-contentiously.*

**Typical Eldership Process:**

- 1) A candidate is identified (either by the recommendation of a current elder, by a recommendation of a church member, or by personally expressing a desire to pursue the eldership process).
- 2) The candidate is confirmed by the Lead Elders and invited to submit himself to the eldership process.
- 3) The candidate goes through the Gospel Community Ordination Process (3-6 months) with members of the current Elder Team. During this process the character, doctrine, and ministry philosophy of the candidate is examined. The Ordination committee seeks to discern both the calling of the candidates and the cultural fit.
- 4) If the candidate successfully completes the ordination process, he is presented to the Elder Team and to the church body as an “Interim Elder.” The Elder Team and church members will have the opportunity to submit questions, comments, or concerns. If no major concerns come to light, which might disqualify the candidate from eldership, then the candidate will be assigned a 3-6 month “Interim Elder” role.
- 5) At the end of the “Interim” season, through prayer and careful consideration, the Lead Elder Team, along with the Local Elders at the assigned campus, will decide if the “Interim Elder” is a good fit to join the Collective Elder Team. If he is invited to join the Elder Team, the “Interim Elder” will also have the opportunity to decide whether he wants to accept or reject this invitation.
- 6) If the “Interim Elder” accepts, he will sign the “Elder Covenant” and be formally presented to the church body as a full, and active, elder.

***For additional information regarding the qualifications of elders, the dismissal of elders, and the purpose and function of the Elder Team, please see the Gospel Community Church By-laws.***