



We are governed and led by a Board of Elders. Fellowship practices “elder rule” in our governance strategy. The Scriptures teach that elders (or overseers or shepherds) are responsible for the health and direction of the church. Our church is not run by any one individual, a select few staff, or by the proxy of the whole. We are led by our Elder Board through the ministry of the Directional Leader. Elders are nominated by the church body and prayerfully selected by the existing Elder Board. The spiritual qualifications for elders are found in I Timothy 3:1-16 and Titus 1:5-9. The church is to recognize those who are spiritually qualified for church leadership. These individuals are then to minister to the church by godly service and rule. Our staff and community group leaders carry out the functional parameters and policies of the Elder Board.

What is the role of an elder?

The Bible gives guidelines concerning the functional responsibility of the office of elder.

Biblical Parameters of Elder Leadership

To oversee or rule well

I Thessalonians 5:12; I Timothy 3:1; I Timothy 5:17; Hebrews 13:17

The first function of an elder is to direct the affairs of the church (cf. I Timothy 5:17 NIV). In a mutual-ministry approach, the shared responsibility of elder rule will minimize individual weaknesses and maximize strengths. Therefore, the proper administration of the church rests with the elders. The Elder Board may choose to delegate their responsibilities to the church staff, but the authority for the leadership of the church remains with the overseers.

To shepherd the flock of God

Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2

A major function of elders is to shepherd the church. “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care...” (1 Peter 5:2a NIV). The imagery of shepherding suggests tender care, protection, and feeding. These principles lie at the heart of the shepherd-minister who would serve as an elder. They form a Biblical framework for effective ministry.

To be an example

1 Peter 5:3-5; Hebrews 13:7

In emphasizing this point, the writer of Hebrews noted the function in this way: “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Hebrews 13:7 NIV). Elders cannot lead further into spiritual things than they have personally gone. Each elder within God’s church must have the attitude of the Apostle Paul. “Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1 NASB).

To guard right doctrine

1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9

A critical ingredient to effective overseeing is the elder’s command of Scripture. He is to be one who is “holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict” (Titus 1:9 NASB). Doctrinal purity is a prerequisite to spiritual health and vitality. Elders are charged with the task of maintaining the church on solid, Biblical ground.

To confront and initiate discipline when necessary

Matthew 18:15-20; Galatians 6:1-2; 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15; see also 1 Thessalonians 5:12

If the tasks of careful oversight and doctrinal purity are taken seriously, then a proper administration of church discipline will naturally follow. Spiritual discipline is never easy, but it is commanded. The elders must assume their responsibility for the care of the church. It is no wonder, then, that the local body of believers is encouraged in the following way: “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you” (Hebrews 13:17 NASB).

To minister to the sick (or weak) and needy

James 5:14-15; 1 Timothy 5:3-16; compare also God’s concern for the needy in Psalm 12:5; 69:33; et al.; see also “hospitable” in 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:8

A part of the elders’ responsibility is to shepherd those in need. While there is debate as to whether the “sick” of James 5 are physically sick or spiritually weak (perhaps both), one definite principle is sure: the elders are to evidence their concern for those who are in need by faithful prayer. For certain, an elder’s ministry reaches out to those in need.

To appoint and commission leadership

1 Timothy 5:22; 1 Timothy 4:14; compare with Ephesians 4:11-12

As elders oversee and shepherd the church, they will, of necessity, be equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. Not only do elders care for the administrative organization of the church, but they are responsible for the raising up of new leadership as well. Such an ongoing task requires the utmost spiritual discernment and care.

Our elders are charged with sustaining the mission and extending the vision of Fellowship. They accomplish these goals by establishing yearly staff parameters and goals and evaluating and approving the staff ministry plan. Our elders ensure that resources are deployed properly and that the health of the staff and congregations is maintained. Our elders define the operating principles of the church and evaluate the role and ministry of the Directional Leader. The Directional Leader is responsible for leading the ministry staff.

Our staff embraces the concept of team. We use these teams to facilitate and manage ministry. The staff team, under the leadership of the Elder Board and Directional Leader (who also serves as an elder), exists to serve the greater team of our lay leaders. The staff team is here to equip and enable lay leaders to do ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12). Our desire is to produce and release spiritual leaders. The staff team concept also keeps Fellowship from becoming a personality-driven church. This is Christ's church, and we are here to serve Him. We often say around Fellowship, "we want our name nowhere and our fingerprints everywhere." This is not only true of our church, but also of our staff. Our staff ministers are to be humble servants.