

# Elder Guidelines

*Meadow Springs Community Church*

## Philosophy of Church Leadership

*At Meadow Springs Community Church it is our desire to follow a biblical model of church leadership. The New Testament clearly teaches that local churches are to be led by elders<sup>1</sup> (1 Timothy 3,5; Titus 1; Acts 15, 20.-35; 1 Thessalonians 5:12, 13; Hebrews 13:17, James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:5).*

Titus 1:5

The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.

*The following are general statements concerning our philosophy of how elders are to lead the church.*

### Servant Leadership

We believe that the biblical model for leadership is *servant leadership*.

John 13:14-15

Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet. " I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.

Mark 10:42-45

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. " Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

"Nothing distinguishes the kingdoms of man from the kingdom of God more than their diametrically opposed views of power. One seeks to control people, the other to serve people; one promotes self, the other prostrates self, one seeks prestige and position, the other lifts up the lowly and despised."

Charles Colson

Because this quality of leadership is so fundamental, our elders are to be called "servant elders."

### *The Key Attitude of Leadership*

Elders are to be loving, **humble** servants who sacrifice who sacrifice their time and energy for the good of others.

1 Peter 5:5

All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

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<sup>1</sup>*overseers, bishops, pastors* are terms that refer to the same office in the New Testament: Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Peter 5:1,2.

### *The Method of Leadership*

While servants, elders are responsible to lead the church body. However, their primary method of leadership is *by example*.

I Peter 5:1-3

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ' Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers-- not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve;<sup>3</sup> not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

Servants elders are to be examples of the Word at work in their lives.

### **Shared Leadership**

We believe that the leadership structure which best serves a local body of Christ and reflects the model of the early church is a team of elders who share equally the responsibility for leading the church.

Acts 14-23

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

See also: Acts 15; 20:17,28; 1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:5; James 5:14; 1 Peter 5:1

The benefits of shared leadership by a team of equals includes balancing each others' weaknesses, lightening the workload, and providing accountability. In practice, it takes a good deal of effort to work together as a team rather than to simply follow one person's lead. However, the effort that is required is the kind of effort that increases our relationship skills and matures us as loving leaders of Christ's church.

Each of our leaders must be committed to working together, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in humble, Christ-like love. Servant elders must humbly and lovingly relate to one another. They must be able to patiently build consensus, compromise, persuade, listen, handle disagreement, forgive, receive rebuke and correction, confess sin, and appreciate the wisdom and perspective of others - even those with whom they disagree. They must be able to submit to one another, speak kindly and gently to one another, be patient with their fellow colleges, defer to one another, and speak their minds openly in truth and love.<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, elders are responsible for making the final decisions within a local church body.

**Hebrews 13:17**

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

### *Elders and congregation*

When issues are brought to the congregation, the elders, as Spirit-placed shepherds, take the lead in guiding the congregation in orderly and prayerful decision-making. As the congregation looks to its elders for wise leadership, the elders also look to the congregation - their brothers and sisters - for wisdom, counsel, inspiration, creative ideas, help, and prayer. Elders who understand the sacred nature and dynamic energy of the Spirit-empowered congregation know the necessity of congregational participation in all major decisions.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Biblical Eldership*, 96.

<sup>3</sup> *Biblical Eldership*, 294.

### **Long-term Leadership**

Those who seek, qualify, and are chosen to be elders will continue in that role on a long-term basis. There is not evidence that the elders appointed in the early church ever ceased to provide leadership to the people of their local church body. Eldership is not a casual responsibility, but involves a sober and sincere commitment to the people of the church. Eldership is not so much a position as it is a covenant of loyal, loving leadership. Church leaders must be devoted to the long-term care of the people under their shepherding influence.

Having said this, it is also our desire to continuously provide opportunities for new leadership to surface, to be trained, and to be appointed to appropriate positions, including Eldership. We attach no **specific** number or limitation to the Eldership team.

### **Male Leadership**

The Bible teaches that men and women are fully equal in personhood, dignity, and value, yet distinct in their God-designed functions and roles. We are committed to what we believe is the biblical model of male elders, while at the same time demonstrating great sensitivity to and - appreciation for the tremendous contributions women make in the body of Christ.

Not only do the biblical requirements for eldership specifically state that an elder must be male (I Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:6), we believe that male leadership is modeled and taught throughout the Scriptures. We believe that the distinction between men and women in this area is a functional one, and in no way demeans women or exalts men.

# Qualifications of an Elder

## *Biblical and Attitudinal Qualifications*

### **A. Desire to be a shepherd of God's people I Timothy 3:1b**

This is an attitude generated by God's Spirit. It naturally demonstrates itself in action, both sacrificial and loving service.

### **B. List of objective qualifications from I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 (respectively)**

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|---|---|
| a. above reproach   | a. blameless                                      |
| b. husband of one wife  | b. husband of one wife                            |
| c. temperate  | c. children who believe, not wild and disobedient |
| d. self controlled  | d. not overbearing                                |
| e. respectable  | e. not quick tempered                             |
| f. hospitable   | f. not violent                                    |
| g. able to teach  | g. not given to drunkenness                       |
| h. not given to drunkenness   | h. not pursuing dishonest gain                    |
| i. gentle, not violent  | i. hospitable                                     |
| j. not quarrelsome  | j. loves what is good                             |
| k. not a lover of money   | k. self-controlled                                |
| l. able to manage own family well, see that own children obey him with proper respect | l. upright  |
| m. not a recent convert   | m. holy   |
| n. good reputation with outsiders   | n. disciplined                                    |
|   | o. knowledgeable of scriptures                    |

*For additional explanation or clarification of these traits, see "How to Spot a Spiritual Leader" packet.*

## *Qualification Process*

### **A. Elder Selection and Examination**

**1. Identification.** The initial stage of identifying potential elders is prayer. Elder candidates may be identified by:

- a. Pastoral staff and elder team
- b. Ministry leadership
- c. Participating members of the body
- d. Individuals who express interest

The person in question *must* be involved in a ministry capacity at MSCC for one year before consideration.

**2. Observation** of those men who exhibit the qualifications of an elder is the second stage in the selection process. The idea will be brought to the whole team, and a preliminary observation of the individual will be made by the team before the man is approached about the possibility of eldership. Observation will focus on the following areas: *doctrinal beliefs, personal giftedness, ministry interests, family unity, moral integrity, commitment of time, involvement in ministry (Discovery Series, etc.), personal spiritual growth.* After the team has had sufficient time to observe the candidate, they will move to the next stage in the process:

3. *Evaluation.* The elder team will meet to discuss the candidate's eligibility based on what has been observed about him. When the team has filled out the "How to Spot a Spiritual Leader" survey and has carefully evaluated the candidate, they must come to a unanimous agreement regarding the man's qualifications to become an elder. If the unanimous recommendation is that the individual in question would make a capable elder, he will be approached by a member or members of the elder team regarding potential eldership. The man will be given a full understanding of the commitment and a copy of the elder covenant.

4. *Examination.* This is the first visible step in the process. Elder team members will begin discussions with the wife of the candidate, neighbors, coworkers, etc. Personal examination of the individual will include the following process:

a. Upon identification as a potential elder, the entire elder team will hold an informal interview with the candidate and his wife regarding his testimony, personal interests in ministry, giftedness, the wife's willingness to have her husband become an elder, etcetera.

b. The candidate will undergo self-examination by completing a "Spiritual Leader" survey, a spiritual gifts test, and a personality assessment.

c. The candidate will be identified publicly: the elder team will present him to the church body as a potential elder, and will inform the body that they are seeking input from the congregation regarding his fitness for church leadership as an elder.

d. An elder will be assigned to the candidate. The elder will be responsible for making contact, accepting input, and sharing information with the team. Other elders (minimum of 3) will be charged with the responsibility to watch and pray over the process.

e. All elders will be involved in the final examination regarding: input, contacts, assessment of character, and examination of qualifications.

5. *Elder-in-testing.* The candidate will function with the elders as an elder. He will complete the training program, which will take approximately six months. After this, the elder team will make a decision as to whether or not the elder-in-testing will be accepted as an elder.

6. *Installation.* Installation involves:

a. A public ceremony

b. It is not a holy sacrament or ordination

c. Laying on of hands and prayer I Timothy 5:17-25

*To be added: Elder Discipline/Removal*

# Elder Functions as Individuals

## *Individual Job Description*

*The basic jobs of an elder are to teach, lead and oversee, care for, protect and discipline the members of the body.*

### **A. Teach**

1. Teach in some capacity (discipleship, Sunday school, Care Group, etc.)
2. Be a humble and godly example of Biblical principles and Christian living
3. Be a part of the learning process among fellow elders through spiritual interaction
4. Be involved in continual study of the Bible to improve knowledge and understanding of truth
5. Teach individuals Biblical truth through personal interaction
6. Train and equip others for leadership

### **B. Lead & Oversee**

1. Help set goals, vision, and directions for the church
2. Attend and participate in elder meetings as outlined in the next section
3. Carry out leadership and shepherding as assigned and agreed upon in leadership meetings
4. Help guide and mentor deacons, ministry leaders
5. Be involved in decision-making of major financial, personnel, and property decisions, and overall management

### **C. Care For**

1. Pray for the Body and individuals
2. Put in place the processes and individuals that will meet the physical needs of the Body members (elders should not do everything, but they should see to it that it is done)
3. Develop personal relationships with other Body members
4. Try to guide every member into small group relationships (men's, women's, Care Groups, etc.)
5. Provide comfort
6. Lay hands on sick, etc. as requested
7. Provide counsel and resolve conflicts as appropriate
8. Meet with, visit, call, and write to body members as requested or discerned
9. Support pastor/elders in every way possible

### **D. Protect & Discipline**

1. Correct any false doctrine
2. Discipline Body members as necessary
3. Exhort and admonish members to fulfill responsibilities and grow spiritually
4. Discern and refute false teachers
5. Be watchful of issues in society and the church that would hinder spiritual growth
6. Be mediators of conflicts within the church to achieve unity

### **Deacons/ Ministry Heads**

Deacons in the early church carried out similar tasks and responsibilities as elders. They were different in the requirement of teaching ability and role. The role of deacons in our Body specifically:

1. Oversee a particular ministry (men's, etc.)
2. Carry out administrative duties
3. Lead committees (finances, etc.)
4. Attend leadership meetings and participate in planning
5. Fill various caring functions in church

# **Elder Functions as a Team**

## *Team Job Description*

### **A. Team Principles**

1. Elder meetings and relationships must be based in prayer
2. Elders must pray for the Body and for each other
3. Principles of collective leadership will be employed: each elder shares equally the authority and responsibility in the decision-making process
4. Elders shall serve as checks and balances for each other
5. Elders must submit and/or defer to each other

### **B. Working Together**

1. Elders must strive to build unity
2. One elder shall be designated to lead the meetings
3. Elders must exercise humility, patience, and respect at all times-
4. All elders are encouraged to submit agenda items
5. Every concern of an elder will be heard and addressed
6. Elders will balance each others weaknesses
7. Each elder shares the responsibility for the work and for decisions
8. Elders will strive to patiently build consensus (willing to compromise when possible)

### **C. Decision-Making Process**

1. Elders will strive for unanimity. If unanimity can not be reached, the elders will continue to wait for clear leading from the Lord (see Bylaws for further explanation)
2. All elders will be heard and respected in discussions
3. Frequent prayer will be incorporated into the process of seeking God's leading
4. All elders must speak their minds openly in truth and love-- discussion will continue so as to bring clarity to issues or uncertainties that any elder may have
5. An open vote will be taken on each item for decision
6. If possible, important decisions will not be made until all elders have had opportunity to vote
7. Implementation of decisions will be clearly defined and assigned
8. Once a decision is reached, all members must support the decision publicly

### **D. Divided/Defined Responsibilities**

1. Elders will divide responsibilities by interest and gifts
2. Responsibilities will be clearly defined
3. Primary responsibilities are: caring, leading, teaching, overseeing, protecting, correcting
4. Each elder has the responsibility to pray for members and fellow elders

### **E. Discipline**

1. Elders must take necessary steps to discipline members of the body and each other in spiritual and church matters
2. Biblical discipline shall be used as defined in I Cor. 5-6; 11 Cor. 2: 1 -1 1; H Thess. 3:6-15, and I Tim. 5:19, 20, Matt. 18
3. Elders must submit to discipline of the other elders.
4. Much prayer and early counsel should precede the need for discipline