

Question and Answers Concerning Polity Proposal

Question 1: Why Are We Recommending This Model?

Questions Submitted Related

- What caused Pastor Jason and Pastor Craig to decide to recommend the elder/deacon process for our church?
- How will this idea of selecting deacons and elders differ from the previous structure?
- What will make this time any different in creating unity within the church?

How did this conversation begin?

The conversation that eventually led to this proposal began several years ago.

At that time, we invited **Dr. Eric Ramsey, Executive Director of the West Virginia Convention of Southern Baptists, to First Baptist Church to provide training for our deacons.** Part of that training involved helping our deacons understand the biblical distinctions between the responsibilities of pastors/elders and deacons—particularly how their responsibilities, accountability, and obligations differ.

That training prompted an ongoing conversation between Pastor Jason and Pastor Craig: **How does Scripture actually describe the leadership, service, and ministry of a local church?**

We began studying that question together and eventually included some of our deacons in those conversations.

Later, the conversation expanded again. Additional men from the congregation joined us for a more intentional period of study. Over approximately seven months, the group met several times, worked through Scripture and additional resources, discussed questions, and considered how the New Testament describes the leadership and ministry of the local church.

The proposal before the congregation, therefore, did not originate with a recent decision. It grew out of **several years of conversation followed by an extended period of intentional biblical study involving a larger group of people from within our church.**

And throughout that process, we kept returning to the same basic question: **If Jesus Christ is the Head of His church, how has He instructed His church to function?**

Christ Rules His Church

This is where any discussion of church governance must begin.

Jesus said: **“I will build my church.”** — Matthew 16:18

The church belongs to Jesus. Paul writes in Colossians 1:18: **“And he is the head of the body, the church.”** Ephesians 1:22 likewise says that God: **“put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church.”** And before giving His church its mission, Jesus declares: **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”** — Matthew 28:18

Therefore, the first question in church governance cannot simply be: *Who gets to make the decisions?* The more fundamental question is: **How has King Jesus instructed His church to order itself underneath His authority?**

No pastor owns the church. No elder owns the church. No deacon owns the church. No group within the congregation owns the church. **Jesus Christ is the Head of His church.** Our responsibility is to order ourselves as faithfully as possible according to His Word.

As we studied the New Testament, we found a pattern that can be summarized simply:

Christ rules His church.

Elders shepherd His church.

Deacons serve His church.

The saints do the work of ministry.

Together, the whole body pursues Christ's mission.

Elders Shepherd His Church

The New Testament repeatedly describes local churches as being shepherded by qualified elders. At the conclusion of Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey, Acts 14:23 tells us: **“And when they had appointed elders for them in every church...”**

Paul later instructed Titus: **“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town.”** — Titus 1:5

Acts 20 is particularly helpful because several biblical terms for church leadership appear together. Acts 20:17 says: **“Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.”** Then Paul tells these same elders: **“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for [or shepherd] the church of God.”** — Acts 20:28

The men identified as **elders** in verse 17 are called **overseers** in verse 28 and commanded to **shepherd** the flock. Peter uses the same language: **“I exhort the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight.”** — 1 Peter 5:1–2

These passages help explain why we have used the terms **pastor, elder, and overseer** together throughout our teaching. They describe closely related aspects of the same shepherding responsibility.

Scripture also provides explicit qualifications for these shepherds in **1 Timothy 3:1–7** and **Titus 1:5–9**.

And we repeatedly encounter a **plurality** of elders:

- “elders...in every church” — Acts 14:23
- “elders of the church” — Acts 20:17
- “elders among you” — 1 Peter 5:1
- “appoint elders” — Titus 1:5

That means the responsibility of shepherding a congregation is shared among qualified men rather than resting entirely upon one individual.

And Scripture makes clear that this responsibility carries serious accountability. Hebrews 13:17 describes leaders as: **“keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.”**

Biblical elder leadership is therefore not primarily about gaining authority. **It is about accepting responsibility and accountability for shepherding Christ's flock.**

Deacons Serve His Church

The New Testament also identifies **deacons** as a distinct office within the church. Paul opens Philippians by addressing: **“all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.”**

— Philippians 1:1

And after giving qualifications for overseers in 1 Timothy 3:1–7, Paul immediately turns to qualifications for deacons: **“Deacons likewise must be dignified...”** — 1 Timothy 3:8

Acts 6 also provides an important pattern for understanding this kind of servant ministry. A practical crisis developed because some widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution. The apostles responded: **“It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.”** — Acts 6:2 Notice that they did **not** say the need was unimportant. They made sure the need was addressed.

The congregation was instructed to identify qualified people who could be appointed to that responsibility, while the apostles said: **“But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”**

— Acts 6:4

Acts 6 does not formally call these seven men “deacons,” so we should not claim more for the passage than it actually says. But it provides an important biblical pattern: **spiritual leaders remaining devoted to their particular calling while qualified servants ensure that important practical ministry needs are faithfully met.**

That helps us understand the kind of significant service we want deacons to provide:

caring for people, meeting practical needs, facilitating mercy and benevolence, solving problems, and helping protect the unity of the church through service.

The goal is not simply to have people who hold the title of deacon. **The goal is to have deacons who meaningfully serve the body of Christ.**

The Saints Do the Work of Ministry

The presence of elders and deacons does not mean that ministry becomes concentrated in the hands of a smaller number of people.

Scripture teaches exactly the opposite. Ephesians 4 says that Christ gave leaders to His church: **“to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”** — Ephesians 4:12

Notice who does the work of ministry: **the saints.**

Church leaders are not given to the church so that they can perform every ministry themselves. They are called to **equip God's people for ministry.**

Paul continues in Ephesians 4:16: **“when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”**

That is the picture we are pursuing: **every part working properly.**

Peter makes the same point: **“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another.”** — 1 Peter 4:10

And Paul describes the church in 1 Corinthians 12 as one body composed of many members with different gifts and functions.

Therefore:

Elders shepherd ministry.

Deacons facilitate ministry through service.

The congregation does ministry.

Healthy elder leadership should equip more people to serve according to the gifts God has given them.

How Is This Model Different?

The primary difference is not simply changing names or moving boxes around on an organizational chart. It is an attempt to clarify **biblical responsibilities**.

Christ rules. Everything and everyone remains underneath His authority.

Elders shepherd. They teach, equip, lead, protect, care for the flock, provide spiritual oversight, and remain accountable for that shepherding.

Deacons serve. They help organize and accomplish significant ministries of care, mercy, practical assistance, and service.

The saints minister. Members use their gifts and abilities to build up the body and carry the gospel into the community.

The congregation exercises the responsibilities Scripture gives to the congregation. We will address those responsibilities specifically later in this document. The goal isn't to have one group doing everything. It is the picture Paul gives us in Ephesians 4: “**when each part is working properly.**”

What Will Make This Different in Creating Unity?

We want to be careful here because no organizational structure can create Christian unity. **Biblical structures cannot guarantee biblical behavior.** Paul tells the church: “**Walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.**”
— Ephesians 4:1–3

Notice that Paul doesn't tell the church to **create** the unity of the Spirit. He tells believers to **maintain** it through humility, gentleness, patience, love, and peace. Ultimately, unity comes from our common life in Christ.

But a biblical structure can provide **clarity about responsibility and accountability**. Elders know they are responsible to shepherd.

Deacons know they are responsible to serve.

Members know they are called to ministry. And everyone knows that Jesus Christ remains Lord over His church. That clarity can help us pursue the unity Scripture commands.

Why Are Pastor Jason and Pastor Craig Recommending This?

After several years of conversation, followed by an intentional period of studying these passages with other men from our congregation, we have become convinced that this framework faithfully reflects the pattern of leadership, service, and ministry we see in the New Testament.

We did not begin by deciding what organizational structure we preferred and then search Scripture for verses to support it. **We began with Scripture and asked what our structure should look like in response to it.** That is the question we continue to place before the church:

If Scripture gives us a recognizable pattern for the leadership, service, and ministry of the local church, shouldn't we seek to reflect that pattern as faithfully as we can?

That is why we are recommending this model.

Christ rules.

Elders shepherd.

Deacons serve.

Saints minister.

Together, we pursue the mission.

We are not trying something new; we are trying to be faithful to something ancient. Our goal is not innovation. Our goal is apostolic faithfulness.

Question 2 — Who Will the Elders Be, and How Will They Be Selected?

Questions Submitted

- How many elders will we have?
- Who nominates and examines them?
- Will all age groups be represented?
- How will the initial group of elders be chosen?
- Won't it be difficult to find men who meet the qualifications found in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9?
- Will the church vote on the approval of elders?
- Will the church be involved in their selection process? What will this process be?
- How will elders be identified?
- Will we need to reconstitute a search committee? If so, how will its members be chosen?
- Once chosen, how long will elders serve?
- Can qualified women serve as elders? If not, why? Does Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy reflect the culture of his day, and would applying it consistently prohibit women from teaching men in Sunday School?

What Is an Elder?

Before explaining how elders will be selected, it is important to remember what they are being selected **to do**. The New Testament uses the language of **elder, overseer, and shepherd/pastor** to describe closely related aspects of the same spiritual office.

Acts 20 provides one of the clearest examples. Paul: “**called the elders of the church to come to him.**” — Acts 20:17

He then tells those same men:

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for [shepherd] the church of God.” — Acts 20:28

Peter uses the same three concepts: **“I exhort the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight.” — 1 Peter 5:1–2**

An elder, therefore, is not primarily a board member, organizational representative, or institutional decision-maker. **An elder is a shepherd.**

His responsibility is to teach, protect, equip, lead, know, and care for Christ's flock. That understanding governs everything about how elders should be identified.

Who Is Qualified to Be an Elder?

We do not create the qualifications for eldership. **Scripture does.**

Paul writes: **“Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach...” — 1 Timothy 3:2**

He continues by describing a man who is gentle rather than violent or quarrelsome, not controlled by money, faithful in managing his household, spiritually mature, and respected by those outside the church.

Titus 1:5–9 gives a similar list and adds that an elder 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.”** Notice what dominates the biblical qualifications:

Character. Scripture does not require that an elder be a successful businessman, wealthy, retired, highly educated, popular, or of a particular age. The questions are about his character, marriage and family, doctrine, spiritual maturity, reputation, temperament, and ability to teach.

That means we will not lower the qualifications because we believe we need another elder.

We are not trying to fill seats. We are trying to recognize shepherds whom Christ has qualified to care for His church.

How Many Elders Will We Have?

The New Testament consistently presents a **plurality of elders** serving local churches. Paul and Barnabas: **“appointed elders for them in every church.”** — Acts 14:23

Paul summoned: **“the elders of the church”** — Acts 20:17

Titus was instructed: **“appoint elders in every town.”** — Titus 1:5

James writes: **“Let him call for the elders of the church.”** — James 5:14

For that reason, our governing documents will establish a **minimum of three elders**. That provides genuine plurality rather than placing the responsibility for shepherding the church upon one individual.

Beyond that minimum, however, **there will not be a mandatory number of elders**. Nor do we intend to create a formula such as: *one elder for every certain number of members or attenders*.

Scripture gives us no such equation. Instead, the elder body can grow according to the shepherding needs of the congregation, and the number of biblically qualified men God raises up.

We will not say: *“Our structure requires seven elders, so we need to find seven men.”* We will begin with the biblical qualifications.

There will be a minimum plurality of three, but beyond that there is no quota to reach and no ratio to maintain. Qualification comes before quantity.

Will All Age Groups Be Represented?

Not necessarily, because elders are not intended to function as representatives of demographic constituencies.

Paul tells the Ephesian elders:

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock.”

— Acts 20:28

Peter similarly instructs elders: **“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you.”** — 1 Peter 5:2

The responsibility is **the whole flock**. A plurality of elders will naturally bring different ages, experiences, perspectives, strengths, and gifts. That diversity can be very helpful. But an elder does not represent an age group. He doesn't represent senior adults, young families, students, a particular Sunday School class, or a particular ministry.

Elders are shepherds, not representatives.

Every elder is responsible for loving and shepherding the whole congregation.

How Will Elders Be Identified?

The New Testament places significant responsibility upon existing spiritual leadership to recognize and develop additional qualified leaders.

Paul instructed Titus: **“appoint elders in every town as I directed you.”** — Titus 1:5

Paul provides Timothy with the qualifications for overseers in 1 Timothy 3 and later cautions him: **“Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands.”** — 1 Timothy 5:22

And Paul gives Timothy this pattern for multiplying spiritual leadership: **“What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”** — 2 Timothy 2:2

Following that biblical pattern, **existing elders will take the initiative in prayerfully identifying and engaging potential elders.** We do not anticipate forming a traditional search committee for elders.

The general process will be: **Existing elders identify → engage → examine → recommend → congregation affirms.**

The existing elders will look for men whose lives already demonstrate the qualifications of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 and approach them about the possibility of serving. This will begin a conversation, not an appointment.

The man's own sense of calling and desire matters as well. Paul begins his discussion of qualifications by saying: **“If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.”** — 1 Timothy 3:1

No man should be pressured into eldership simply because someone else believes he would be good at it.

How Will Potential Elders Be Examined?

Carefully and prayerfully.

Paul's warning is significant: **“Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands.”** — 1 Timothy 5:22

Potential elders will be evaluated according to the biblical qualifications, including: personal character and spiritual maturity; marriage and family life; reputation within and outside the church; understanding of Scripture; ability to teach; commitment to sound doctrine; temperament and relational health; understanding of shepherding; willingness to accept accountability; agreement with the doctrinal convictions of the church; demonstrated love for Christ and His people.

The question is: **Do we see in this man's life the character, doctrine, gifting, maturity, and shepherding heart Scripture requires of an elder?** Acts 20:28 reminds elders that: **“the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.”** Ultimately, the church is not manufacturing shepherds. **We are prayerfully trying to recognize the men God is raising up to shepherd His people.**

Will the Congregation Be Involved in Selecting Elders?

Yes. Existing elders will have primary responsibility for identifying, engaging, and examining potential elders. But qualified candidates will then be presented to the congregation for affirmation.

That means the process is neither:

The elders privately choose whomever they want and the congregation has no involvement.

Nor: The congregation conducts a popularity contest and whoever receives the most nominations becomes an elder.

Instead: Existing elders identify. Potential elders willingly engage the process. Scripture establishes the qualifications. Existing elders carefully examine. Qualified candidates are recommended. The congregation affirms.

The congregation's vote does not make an unqualified man qualified. Rather, the congregation is saying: **“We recognize in this man the qualifications Scripture describes, and we affirm him to shepherd this body.”** The Constitution and Bylaws will establish the precise procedural details surrounding that affirmation.

How Will the Initial Group of Elders Be Selected?

The initial process will follow the same philosophy. Pastor Jason and Pastor Craig presently serve in the pastoral/shepherding role. They will prayerfully identify and engage men within the congregation whose lives appear to demonstrate the qualifications Scripture establishes.

Those men will be approached about whether they are willing to prayerfully consider the responsibility. They will then be evaluated according to the biblical qualifications. Those who are qualified and willing to serve will be **presented to the congregation for affirmation.**

We therefore do not anticipate reconstituting a traditional search committee to find elders. The initial elders will be identified through the same basic process we intend to use going forward: **Existing shepherds prayerfully identify and examine potential shepherds, and the congregation affirms those presented.**

How Long Will Elders Serve?

The New Testament does not prescribe a particular term length for elders.

Scripture does not tell us that an elder must serve two years, three years, four years, or any other predetermined term. Therefore, we should not present a particular term structure as though it were biblically mandated.

The Constitution and Bylaws will establish the practical procedures regarding elder service, review, continuation, stepping away from active service, and removal when necessary.

But one biblical principle is already clear: **An elder must remain qualified to remain an elder.** Paul provides explicit instructions concerning accountability involving elders: **“Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all...”** — 1 Timothy 5:19–20

Eldership does not place a man beyond accountability. **It increases his accountability.**

Won't It Be Difficult to Find Men Who Meet These Qualifications?

It may be. But difficulty finding qualified men cannot become a reason to lower the qualifications Scripture gives us. Again, Paul warns: **“Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands.”** — 1 Timothy 5:22

We will maintain a minimum plurality of three elders, but beyond that **we have no quota to fill.** If God raises up additional qualified shepherds, we can recognize them. If He has not yet done so, we wait and invest in developing men toward spiritual maturity.

That changes the question somewhat. Instead of only asking: *“Where will we find enough qualified men?”* we should also be asking: **“How are we discipling men toward the kind of maturity Scripture requires of shepherds?”**

Paul tells Timothy: **“What you have heard from me...entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.”** — 2 Timothy 2:2

The goal is not simply to **find leaders**. Part of the responsibility of existing leaders is to **develop future leaders**.

Can Women Serve as Elders?

This question deserves careful treatment because it involves both our understanding of eldership and our understanding of Scripture.

First, the question is **not** whether women are intelligent, spiritually mature, capable of teaching, gifted for ministry, or essential to the health of the church. Scripture itself gives us abundant examples of women serving Christ significantly.

Priscilla, together with Aquila, helped Apollos understand: **“the way of God more accurately.”** — Acts 18:26 Phoebe is commended by Paul for her significant service to the church in Romans 16:1–2. Titus 2:3–5 explicitly instructs older women to teach and disciple younger women. First Corinthians 11:5 refers to women praying and prophesying. And 1 Peter 4:10 says to the church: **“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another.”**

Women are indispensable participants in the ministry and mission of Christ's church. The question before us is much narrower:

Whom does Scripture authorize the church to recognize in the particular shepherding office of elder? We believe Scripture reserves that office for qualified men.

What Does 1 Timothy Say?

The submitted question specifically raises 1 Timothy 2:12: **“I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man...”**

and asks whether applying this passage would require us to prohibit women from teaching any class in which men are present. We do not believe it does. But we need to read Paul's statement in its context.

Paul continues: **“For Adam was formed first, then Eve.”** — 1 Timothy 2:13

The word **“for”** is important because Paul gives the reason for his instruction. His argument does not rest merely upon the social customs of first-century Ephesus. **Paul grounds his reasoning in creation.** He reaches back beyond his own culture to Genesis. Paul then moves directly into his discussion of the office of overseer in chapter 3: **“If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.”**

— 1 Timothy 3:1

Among the qualifications: **“the husband of one wife.”** — 1 Timothy 3:2

Titus gives the same pattern: **“appoint elders in every town...if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife...”**

— Titus 1:5–6

Taken together, we believe these passages establish the shepherding/overseeing office of elder as a responsibility entrusted to biblically qualified men.

Does That Mean Women Cannot Teach Men?

No. That would go beyond what we believe Scripture teaches. Acts 18:26 tells us that Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos aside and: **“explained to him the way of God more accurately.”** Scripture itself therefore provides an example in which a woman participates in communicating theological truth to a man. We do not understand 1 Timothy 2 to prohibit every circumstance in which a woman communicates biblical truth to a man.

Rather, in the context of 1 Timothy 2–3, Paul is addressing **teaching and authority in relation to the ordering and shepherding of the church**, immediately followed by the qualifications for overseers.

Therefore, women may continue to teach Sunday School, disciple believers, lead appropriate ministries, serve on ministry teams, participate in missions, exercise administrative and leadership gifts, and contribute significantly to the theological and spiritual life of this congregation.

Restricting the office of elder to qualified men is not the same thing as restricting women from meaningful ministry.

Different responsibilities do not imply different value. The question is not whether women are capable. The question is:

What qualifications has Scripture established for this particular office?

And because Christ is the Head of the church, we believe our responsibility is to follow those qualifications.

The Principle Behind Elder Selection

Ultimately, we are not beginning with demographics, quotas, vacancies, or organizational formulas. **We begin with Scripture. Scripture defines the office. Scripture establishes the qualifications.**

Existing shepherds prayerfully identify potential shepherds.

Potential elders willingly engage the process.

Candidates are carefully examined.

Qualified men are presented to the congregation.

The congregation affirms.

And elders remain accountable for the responsibility entrusted to them.

Peter summarizes the spirit in which that responsibility must be exercised:

“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight...not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” — 1 Peter 5:2–3

That is the kind of shepherding—and the kind of elders—we are seeking to establish.

Question 3 — What Will the Elders Actually Do?

Questions Submitted

- Can you give examples of the types of decisions that the elders would handle without input from the congregation?
- Will the elders be able to make decisions without the vote of the congregation, especially financial expenditures?
- Who will the elders oversee? Staff? Deacons? Congregation? Each other? Treasurer?
- How will one group of men, regardless of how many, be able to teach, disciple, do visitation, counsel, provide crisis care, oversee baptisms and communion, and develop leaders?
- If a member of the congregation has a concern or idea, do they meet with the elders to discuss it and then the elders decide whether to approve it or not?
- Who handles the finances of the church and makes financial decisions if there are no committees?
- Will the elders have a limit as to how much can be spent before the church votes on the expenditure?

What Does Scripture Tell Elders to Do?

The simplest answer is: **Elders shepherd the church.**

When Paul speaks to the elders from Ephesus, he tells them: “**Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for [shepherd] the church of God.**” — Acts 20:28

Peter gives essentially the same instruction: “**Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight.**” — 1 Peter 5:2

Those two ideas—**shepherding and oversight**—provide the foundation for understanding the work of elders. Elders are charged with caring for the spiritual health, doctrine, direction, and mission of the congregation.

Scripture describes several aspects of that responsibility. **Elders teach and guard sound doctrine.** Titus says an elder 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.”** — Titus 1:9

Paul also warns the Ephesian elders that false teachers will threaten the flock and therefore instructs them to remain alert (Acts 20:28–31).

Elders therefore have particular responsibility for protecting the church's doctrine and ensuring faithful biblical teaching.

Elders shepherd and care for people.

Peter says: **“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you.”** — 1 Peter 5:2 James writes: **“Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him.”** — James 5:14

Shepherding includes knowing people, praying for them, counseling, visiting, comforting, correcting, and caring for their spiritual welfare.

Elders equip the congregation for ministry.

Ephesians 4:11–12 says that Christ gives leaders to the church: **“to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”** This distinction is critical.

The elders' responsibility is not to do all the ministry. Their responsibility includes equipping the church to do ministry.

Elders lead and exercise oversight.

First Timothy 5:17 speaks of: **“the elders who rule well.”**

And Hebrews 13:17 describes spiritual leaders as those who: **“are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account.”** So, elders are entrusted with genuine leadership and oversight.

But biblical authority does not mean total absolute authority is bestowed to elders. **Every elder remains underneath the authority of Christ and His Word.**

Who Will the Elders Oversee?

The question specifically asks: *Staff? Deacons? Congregation? Each other? Treasurer?* The biblical answer is: **The elders are responsible for shepherding and providing spiritual oversight for the whole congregation.**

Paul tells the Ephesian elders: **“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock.”** — Acts 20:28

Peter similarly says: **“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you.”**
— 1 Peter 5:2

So elder oversight includes the whole church: pastors and staff, deacons, ministry leaders, those entrusted with financial responsibilities, and members of the congregation.

But notice where Paul begins: **“Pay careful attention to yourselves...”**

The elders oversee and hold one another accountable as well.

No individual elder—including the Lead Pastor—stands above the elder body or beyond accountability. Plurality provides both **shared shepherding and shared accountability.**

Does Elder Oversight Mean Elders Personally Do Everything?

No. This is one of the most important distinctions in the proposed structure: **Elder oversight is comprehensive, but elder involvement is not exhaustive.**

The elders have responsibility for the spiritual health and direction of the church. That does not mean the elders personally perform every ministry.

Acts 6 provides a helpful pattern. When an important practical ministry problem arose involving widows who were being overlooked, the apostles did not dismiss the problem. They ensured that qualified people were entrusted with addressing it.

At the same time, they said:

“It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.” — Acts 6:2

And: **“But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” — Acts 6:4**

The practical ministry mattered. The spiritual leadership responsibilities mattered. **Both needed faithful people giving appropriate attention to them.**

Likewise, elders do not need to operate the sound system, organize every event, administer every financial transaction, decorate every room, teach every class, make every visit, coordinate every ministry, or solve every practical problem.

Instead, elders help **equip and entrust gifted people to serve.**

How Can a Few Elders Possibly Do All of This?

The submitted question asks how one group of men can possibly teach, disciple, visit, counsel, provide crisis care, oversee baptisms and communion, and develop leaders.

The answer is: **They cannot do all of it alone—and Scripture does not expect them to.**

Ephesians 4 provides the model. Christ gives leaders: **“to equip the saints for the work of ministry.” — Ephesians 4:12**

Paul then describes the goal: **“when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” — Ephesians 4:16**

The biblical goal isn't a handful of extraordinarily busy elders. **It is a healthy church in which every part of the body is working properly.**

Some members teach. Some disciple. Some visit. Some provide practical care. Some exercise hospitality. Some work with children and students. Some help people in crisis. Some organize ministries. Some will serve through the Congregational Care Team. Some serve as deacons.

Some use administrative, financial, technical, musical, or other gifts.

Peter says: “**As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another.**” — 1 Peter 4:10. Elders shepherd and equip that body. **They do not replace it.**

What Kinds of Decisions Will Elders Make Without a Congregational Vote?

Yes, elders will make ordinary leadership and ministry decisions without bringing every matter before the congregation for a vote. Meaningful oversight requires the ability to lead. Examples may include decisions involving:

Teaching and discipleship — sermon series, curriculum, teaching standards, discipleship strategy, theological resources, and those entrusted with teaching.

Pastoral care — coordinating visitation, counseling, crisis response, member care, and other shepherding needs.

Ministry organization — forming ministry teams, recognizing ministry leaders, coordinating ministries, and responding to new ministry opportunities or needs.

Worship and ordinances — providing theological and pastoral oversight for worship, baptism, and the Lord's Supper.

Staff supervision — ordinary direction, accountability, coordination, and evaluation of staff within the boundaries established by the church's governing documents.

Routine operations — ordinary decisions necessary for the church to function faithfully between congregational meetings.

Not every decision requires a church vote. But that does **not** mean every decision belongs to the elders. Scripture assigns genuine responsibilities to the congregation, and the revised Constitution and Bylaws will clearly identify matters reserved for congregational action.

Those will be addressed specifically in **Question 4**.

What If a Member Has an Idea or Concern?

Members should have **direct access to their elders.**

Peter's instruction is: **“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you.”** — 1 Peter 5:2

Shepherds need to know and listen to the people they shepherd. A member should therefore be able to approach an elder with a question, concern, idea, ministry opportunity, or need. That does not mean every ministry idea requires a formal presentation to the entire elder body before anything can happen.

Nor does it mean every idea brought to an elder will automatically be adopted. Rather, elders should listen, pray, seek wisdom, help connect people with appropriate ministries and resources, and provide direction when necessary.

Proverbs gives the general wisdom principle: **“Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.”** — Proverbs 15:22

Healthy elder leadership should not be isolated leadership. **Shepherds should listen to the flock they have been entrusted to shepherd.**

Who Will Handle the Finances of the Church?

We intend to maintain our current Finance Team.

The proposed polity change does not mean that every existing team disappears or that elders personally take over every function currently performed by members of the congregation.

The Finance Team provides valuable ministry and financial accountability. It can continue assisting the church with responsibilities such as:

- counting and properly recording offerings;
- organizing and maintaining financial records;
- helping prepare the annual Ministry Support Plan;
- monitoring income and expenditures;

- providing regular financial reports;
- maintaining appropriate financial safeguards and accountability;
- and assisting with other financial administration as needed.

This is an excellent example of the distinction between **oversight and ministry**. Elders do not need to count offerings, reconcile accounts, maintain financial records, or prepare every financial report in order to provide appropriate oversight.

Paul writes: “**Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.**” — Romans 12:6

Members with financial, administrative, organizational, and stewardship abilities can continue using those gifts through the Finance Team.

Removing layers of governance does not mean removing layers of ministry. The Finance Team can continue providing valuable service without needing to function as a separate governing authority within the church.

Who Will Make Financial Decisions?

There are different levels of financial responsibility.

The congregation approves the Ministry Support Plan. The congregation will continue approving the annual **Ministry Support Plan**—the church's annual plan for financially supporting its ministries, missions, personnel, facilities, and other responsibilities.

That establishes the church's overall financial priorities and authorizes resources for those purposes.

The Finance Team helps administer and monitor it.

The Finance Team will assist with preparing the Ministry Support Plan, monitoring income and expenditures, maintaining records, providing reports, and helping ensure appropriate financial safeguards.

Elders provide appropriate oversight.

Elders will provide leadership and oversight concerning the use of resources within the Ministry Support Plan and the authority established by the governing documents and financial policies.

Major expenditures remain subject to congregational approval.

There will be clearly defined financial limits beyond which an expenditure must be presented to the congregation for approval.

So the answer to: *“Will the elders have a limit as to how much can be spent before the church votes?”* is: **Yes.**

The precise dollar amount will be established as part of the Constitution, Bylaws, and financial-policy process. Scripture does not prescribe a particular dollar amount, so we will not pretend that it does. But Scripture strongly emphasizes integrity and accountability in financial stewardship.

When Paul was administering a significant financial gift, he deliberately involved others and explained: **“We take this course so that no one should blame us about this generous gift that is being administered by us, for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.”** — 2 Corinthians 8:20–

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That is an excellent principle for church finances.

Financial stewardship should not merely be honest. It should be handled in a way that demonstrates accountability.

So, in simple terms:

The congregation approves the Ministry Support Plan and major expenditures reserved for congregational action.

The Finance Team helps prepare, administer, monitor, record, and report the church's finances.

The elders provide appropriate oversight and leadership within the approved Ministry Support Plan and established financial policies.

Multiple people remain involved so that appropriate accountability is maintained.

What About Baptism and the Lord's Supper?

Elders will provide theological and pastoral oversight of the ordinances. That does not mean only elders may participate in every practical aspect of administering them.

Paul says concerning the Lord's Supper: **“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you...”** — 1 Corinthians 11:23

The ordinances belong to Christ and His church. The responsibility of elders is to help ensure that baptism and the Lord's Supper are practiced faithfully, biblically, and consistently with the gospel.

Again: **Oversight does not require exclusive performance.**

The Principle Behind Elder Oversight

Perhaps the simplest way to understand the role of elders is:

Elder oversight is comprehensive, but elder involvement is not exhaustive.

Elders are responsible for shepherding the whole church, but the whole church participates in ministry.

Elders teach and protect doctrine.

Elders shepherd people.

Elders equip members for ministry.

Elders develop leaders.

Elders provide direction and oversight.

Elders listen to the congregation.

Elders entrust meaningful responsibility to deacons, ministry leaders, teams, staff, and gifted members.

And they do all of this within the boundaries established by Scripture and the church's governing documents.

The goal is not to gather all ministry and decision-making into the hands of a few men.

The goal is what Paul describes in Ephesians 4: **“when each part is working properly.”** — Ephesians 4:16

And Peter describes the spirit in which elders must lead: **“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight...not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”** — 1 Peter 5:2–3

Elders are not being given the church to control. They are being entrusted with a flock to shepherd.

And good shepherding should result not in **less congregational ministry, but more of it.**

Question 4 — What Authority and Responsibility Will the Congregation Retain?

Questions Submitted

- Will the congregation be allowed to vote on items like changes to personnel, aesthetics of the church—specifically the worship center—and Sunday operations **before they take effect**?
- If the church only meets twice a year for business meetings, how will the many other questions that arise between business meetings be answered?
- How will the elders and deacons be held accountable to the church?
- How will members know what the elders and deacons are doing in order to provide that accountability?
- If decisions will be made by the elders, how will the congregation use its spiritual giftedness in the work of the Body of Christ?
- Isn't the work of the leaders of the church “to equip the members for the work of ministry?”

Does Elder Leadership Eliminate Congregational Authority?

No. The model we are proposing is not elder rule with a passive congregation. It is **elder-led and congregationally accountable**.

Throughout the New Testament, we see real responsibilities entrusted to the assembled church. For example, Jesus gives the congregation responsibility in matters of church discipline: **“If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church.”** — Matthew 18:17

Paul likewise addresses the congregation at Corinth regarding serious, unrepentant sin: **“When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus...”** — 1 Corinthians 5:4

Later, when discipline had accomplished its purpose, Paul again involved the congregation in restoration:

“This punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him.” — 2 Corinthians 2:6–7

The congregation also bears responsibility for guarding the gospel. Paul writes not merely to church leaders but to the **churches of Galatia**: **“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”**
— Galatians 1:8

That means a congregation cannot simply say: *“The leaders told us to believe it, so we believed it.”*

The congregation itself has responsibility before Christ to know and guard the gospel.

So congregational responsibility is not something we are retaining simply because we are Baptists. **It is something we see in Scripture.**

What Matters Will Continue to Require Congregational Action?

The revised Constitution and Bylaws will define these responsibilities precisely, but several major areas will remain clearly congregational.

These will include matters such as:

Affirming elders and deacons.

As discussed previously, elders will be examined and presented to the congregation for affirmation. New deacons will likewise ultimately be presented to the congregation for affirmation.

Calling and removal of Ministerial Staff.

The congregation will retain authority in matters involving the calling and removal of the ministerial staff according to the procedures established in the governing documents.

Doctrine and governing documents.

The elders cannot simply change the church's statement of faith, Constitution, or Bylaws on their own. Matters reserved for congregational approval remain congregational decisions.

The annual Ministry Support Plan.

The congregation will continue approving the church's annual Ministry Support Plan.

Major financial decisions.

Financial commitments beyond established limits will require congregational authorization.

Major property decisions.

The purchase, sale, or significant encumbrance of church property should remain subject to congregational approval.

Other matters may also be specifically reserved for congregational action as the revised Constitution and Bylaws are developed.

The principle is: **Elders have meaningful authority to shepherd and lead, and the congregation retains meaningful authority in those matters Scripture and the governing documents entrust to it.**

Will the Congregation Vote on Personnel Changes?

This depends on what is meant by “**personnel**.” Not every staffing decision is the same. The calling or removal of the Lead Pastor is fundamentally different from routine staff supervision, adjustments in job responsibilities, or ordinary personnel administration.

The congregation will retain its authority concerning pastoral leadership wherever the governing documents assign that responsibility to the congregation.

At the same time, ordinary staff supervision cannot reasonably require a congregational vote every time a responsibility, schedule, ministry assignment, or operational detail changes.

The revised Constitution and Bylaws will establish those boundaries clearly.

The important distinction is: **Major personnel decisions reserved for the congregation remain congregational decisions. Routine supervision and administration belong to those entrusted with leadership.**

Will the Congregation Vote on the Aesthetics of the Worship Center?

Not every aesthetic or facility decision will require a congregational vote. The New Testament does not give the assembled congregation responsibility for deciding every operational or aesthetic detail of church life.

There is an important difference between: *“Should we sell the church building?”* and: *“What color should this room be?”*

One is a significant congregational property decision. The other is an ordinary ministry or facility decision.

Likewise, replacing worn equipment, arranging a ministry space, updating décor, or making ordinary improvements should not necessarily require a church-wide vote.

That does not mean members cannot offer ideas or participate in those projects. Quite the opposite. Members with appropriate gifts, experience, and interest can and should be involved.

But: Participation in ministry does not require congregational voting on every ministry decision.

The governing documents and financial policies will establish appropriate boundaries for major expenditures and significant property decisions.

What About “Sunday Operations”?

Again, we need to distinguish **spiritual oversight and ordinary ministry decisions** from matters requiring congregational authorization.

Decisions involving the normal operation of Sunday ministries—service planning, scheduling, ministry coordination, classroom assignments, volunteer organization, worship planning, and similar matters—are ordinarily leadership and ministry decisions.

Scripture charges shepherds: **“Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight.”** — 1 Peter 5:2

Meaningful oversight necessarily involves making ordinary decisions without requiring a congregational vote every time the church operates.

At the same time, members should be heard, ministry leaders should be involved in areas entrusted to them, and decisions should be made wisely rather than arbitrarily.

Elder-led does not mean elder-only.

If We Only Have Two Regular Business Meetings, What Happens Between Them?

The church does not cease functioning between business meetings.

One purpose of elder leadership is to provide consistent spiritual leadership and decision-making throughout the year rather than requiring the congregation to assemble for every operational question.

The elders will meet **monthly**.

And we intend for the **first hour of those monthly elder meetings to be open to members of the congregation.**

That open portion can include general ministry reports, updates, appropriate financial information, ministry developments, and other matters suitable for congregational awareness.

After that open portion, the elders will move into a closed session for matters requiring appropriate confidentiality. That distinction is important.

Some shepherding matters simply should not be discussed publicly:

- confidential pastoral-care situations;
- counseling matters;
- sensitive family concerns;
- personnel matters;
- church-discipline situations;
- private information entrusted to elders;

- or other matters where public discussion could harm someone.

Transparency does not require violating confidentiality.

So, the principle is: **As open as possible; as confidential as necessary.**

The twice-yearly regular business meetings therefore do not represent the only opportunities for communication between elders and the congregation.

There will be **monthly opportunities for members to hear reports and remain informed about the life and ministry of the church.**

And if a matter requiring congregational action arises between regular meetings, a special-called congregational meeting can be held according to the provisions of the governing documents.

How Will the Congregation Know What the Elders Are Doing?

Accountability requires communication.

The open portion of monthly elder meetings is one important way we intend to provide that communication.

The congregation should also receive appropriate reports concerning ministry, finances, significant decisions, and the direction of the church.

This does not mean every elder conversation becomes public.

It means the congregation should not have to wonder: *“What are these men doing?”*

The elders should be able to communicate what they are shepherding, what the church is accomplishing, what challenges are being addressed, and where the church is heading.

And because elders are shepherds, members should have direct access to them. **Accountability works best through relationship, communication, plurality, clear governing documents, and biblical responsibility—not merely through periodic votes.**

How Are Elders Accountable to the Congregation?

Elders are not above accountability to the church. Scripture explicitly provides accountability for elders. Paul tells Timothy: **“Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.”** — 1 Timothy 5:19

That protects elders from frivolous accusations. But Paul immediately continues: **“As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.”**

— 1 Timothy 5:20. That protects the church from unaccountable elders. Both protections matter.

Peter likewise warns elders: **“not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”** — 1 Peter 5:3

And elders themselves answer ultimately to Christ: **“And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”**
— 1 Peter 5:4

No elder is beyond accountability. Elders are accountable: **to Christ, to Scripture, to one another, and to the congregation within the responsibilities Scripture gives the church.**

Plurality itself provides an important layer of accountability because no single pastor operates independently.

What About Deacon Accountability?

Deacons likewise remain accountable to the church.

First Timothy 3 establishes explicit qualifications for deacons, and those qualifications concern ongoing character, not simply the day on which someone is affirmed.

Paul says: **“And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.”** — 1 Timothy 3:10

Deacons serve under appropriate elder oversight, alongside one another, and within ministries entrusted to them. The congregation also participates in affirming new deacons.

We'll address the role, selection, and accountability of deacons more completely in the section specifically devoted to them.

If Elders Make Decisions, How Will Members Use Their Spiritual Gifts?

This question presents two things as though they are opposites when Scripture actually places them together. The submitted question correctly points to the responsibility of leaders:

“Isn't the work of the leaders of the church to equip the members for the work of ministry?” **Yes. Exactly.** That is Ephesians 4.

Christ gives leaders: **“to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”** — Ephesians 4:12

The result is: **“when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”** — Ephesians 4:16

Elder leadership and congregational ministry are not competitors. Biblical elder leadership should produce greater congregational ministry.

Paul develops the same idea in 1 Corinthians 12: **“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord.”** — 1 Corinthians 12:4–5

And: **“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”** — 1 Corinthians 12:27

Peter says: **“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another.”**— 1 Peter 4:10

Members do not need governing authority over an area in order to exercise spiritual gifts within it. A person gifted in mercy does not need a committee vote to show mercy. A gifted teacher does not need institutional authority over Christian education in order to teach faithfully.

Someone gifted in hospitality does not need to govern hospitality ministry in order to practice hospitality.

Someone gifted in administration can help organize ministry without possessing governing authority over the church.

Spiritual giftedness is given for service, not necessarily governance.

What Does Congregational Engagement Look Like, Then?

The congregation is not being asked to become less involved.

We are asking the congregation to become involved in the ways Scripture emphasizes most strongly:

Know and guard the gospel. Affirm qualified leaders. Exercise church discipline and restoration when necessary. Approve matters specifically entrusted to the congregation. Use spiritual gifts. Serve one another. Make disciples. Care for one another. Give generously. Pray. Participate in the mission of the church. Hold leaders biblically accountable.

This is why we have consistently described the model as:

Jesus-ruled, elder-led, deacon-served, congregationally engaged and accountable, and gospel-focused. Congregational engagement is much larger than congregational voting.

The Principle Behind Congregational Authority

The proposed structure is not attempting to choose between **elder leadership** and **congregational responsibility**. We believe Scripture teaches both. Hebrews tells believers: **“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls.”** — Hebrews 13:17. Yet Scripture simultaneously entrusts significant responsibilities to the assembled church. Those truths are not contradictory. They describe different responsibilities within one body. So, the goal is not: **Elders make every decision.** Nor is it: **The congregation votes on every decision.**

Instead: **Elders genuinely shepherd. Deacons genuinely serve. Members genuinely minister. The congregation genuinely exercises its biblical responsibilities.**

And everyone remains underneath the authority of King Jesus and His Word. That is not a less-engaged congregation.

It is a congregation whose engagement is defined by discipleship, ministry, accountability, mission, and biblical responsibility—not simply by how many matters appear on a business-meeting ballot.

Question 5 — What Will Be the Role of Deacons, and How Will They Be Selected?

Questions Submitted

- What is the current “vital role” of the deacons? Previously, a “Deacon of the Week” was available for members to contact for practical needs, but lately there does not seem to be awareness of the duties being performed.
- How will selecting deacons under the proposed structure differ from the previous structure?
- In 2022, First Baptist had nine deacons, while only two or three are presently active. What will make this different?
- Will the church vote on the approval of deacons?
- Will the church be involved in their selection process?
- How many deacons will we have?
- How will deacons be held accountable?
- First Timothy 3:8–10 and 12 speak of male qualifications for deacons. Verse 11 says, “**In the same way, the women...**” Does this mean women may serve as deacons?

What Is the Biblical Role of a Deacon?

The word **deacon** comes from the Greek word *diakonos*, a word associated with service or ministry. The New Testament clearly identifies deacons as a recognized office within the local church.

Paul addresses: **“all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.”** — Philippians 1:1

Likewise, immediately after providing the qualifications for overseers in 1 Timothy 3:1–7, Paul writes: **“Deacons likewise must be dignified...”** — 1 Timothy 3:8. So, Scripture recognizes two distinct offices with different responsibilities: **overseers/elders and deacons.**

Elders are repeatedly charged with shepherding, teaching, and exercising spiritual oversight. Deacons are particularly associated with **service**. This is why we do not view the proposed structure as diminishing deacons.

We want to strengthen the biblical ministry of deacons by giving them meaningful opportunities to serve the body of Christ.

What Does Acts 6 Teach Us About Servant Ministry?

Acts 6 provides an important biblical pattern. As the early church grew, a serious problem developed: **“a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.”** — Acts 6:1

This was not an insignificant problem. People were being overlooked. There was a practical need, a mercy need, and potentially a unity problem within the congregation.

The apostles responded: **“It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables.”** — Acts 6:2 They were not saying that serving tables was beneath them. They were recognizing that **different responsibilities within the church require different people faithfully fulfilling their callings.**

So, they instructed the congregation: **“Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty.”** — Acts 6:3

Then the apostles remained devoted: **“to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”** — Acts 6:4

Acts 6 does not formally call these seven men “deacons,” so we should be careful not to claim more than the passage says. But it gives us an important pattern for understanding diaconal service:

A real need arises. Qualified servants are identified. Responsibility is entrusted to them. People are cared for. Potential division is addressed. Spiritual leaders remain faithful to their shepherding responsibilities. And the church's ministry moves forward.

The result is striking: **“And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem.”** — Acts 6:7. That is a beautiful picture of what happens when different parts of the body faithfully fulfill their responsibilities.

What Will Deacons Actually Do?

We envision deacons as **servants and problem-solvers** within the congregation. Their ministry can include areas such as:

Benevolence and mercy ministry — helping the church respond wisely and compassionately to people experiencing financial or practical need.

Care for widows and vulnerable members — helping ensure that people do not become overlooked.

Practical congregational needs — responding when members experience circumstances where tangible assistance is needed.

Coordinating service — helping connect needs with members who have the ability and willingness to meet them.

Supporting congregational care — working alongside elders and other care ministries so that people are known and cared for.

Protecting unity through service — helping address practical problems before they become unnecessary sources of frustration or division.

In other words, the question deacons should regularly be asking is: **“Where are people hurting, where are practical needs going unmet, and how can we mobilize the church to serve?”**

Deacons do not need to perform every act of service themselves.

Like elders, they can **mobilize other members into ministry**. The goal isn't to create a small group of men who personally handle every practical need. It is to have spiritually mature servants who help organize the congregation to care for one another well.

What About the “Deacon of the Week”?

A Deacon of the Week can certainly be a useful ministry tool if it helps members know whom to contact when a practical need arises. Nothing in the proposed structure prevents deacons from using a rotation or another system that provides members with a clear point of contact.

But Scripture does not prescribe a particular scheduling mechanism for deacons. So, the larger goal is not simply to preserve a particular title or weekly rotation. The goal is: **Members should know that their deacons are available to help coordinate practical care and service when needs arise.** The deacon body can determine the most effective way to accomplish that.

How Will New Deacons Be Identified?

Here the process will differ somewhat from the process for elders. Acts 6 provides a helpful pattern. The apostles told the congregation: **“Pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.”** — Acts 6:3

Then: **“what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen...”** — Acts 6:5. The congregation therefore participated directly in identifying potential servants. Following that pattern, **the congregation will be invited to nominate potential new deacons from among the membership.**

But nomination does not automatically make someone a deacon. Paul writes: **“And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.”** — 1 Timothy 3:10

So, the process will generally be: **Congregation nominates → elders and current deacons engage → nominees are evaluated according to Scripture → qualified nominees are recommended → congregation affirms.** This gives the congregation meaningful involvement at both ends of the process.

The congregation identifies potential servants, and the congregation ultimately affirms those who have been examined and recommended.

What Qualifications Will Be Used?

Again, we don't invent them. Paul gives them in 1 Timothy 3:8–13. Deacons must be: **“dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.”**

They must: **“hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.”**

And: **“let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.”** Verse 12 adds that a deacon must be: **“husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.”** Like elder qualifications, the emphasis is overwhelmingly upon **character and spiritual maturity.**

The church isn't merely looking for someone willing to do a job. **We are looking for spiritually mature servants who can be trusted with the needs of Christ's people.**

What Happens to Men Who Have Already Been Affirmed as Deacons?

They remain recognized as deacons. The proposed structure does not erase the congregation's previous affirmation of men who have already served in this office. We intend to maintain a roster that distinguishes between **active and inactive deacons.**

Some previously affirmed deacons may not presently be actively serving. That does not require us to erase their previous affirmation or force them through the entire nomination process again.

If an inactive deacon desires to return to active service, he can communicate directly with the deacon body about returning to active ministry. **The congregation does not need to re-nominate a man whom the congregation has already affirmed as a deacon.**

The nomination, examination, and congregational affirmation process described above applies to **new deacons**. This allows us to honor the congregation's previous affirmation while also clearly identifying which deacons are presently active in ministry.

How Many Deacons Will We Have?

Scripture does not prescribe a fixed number. Acts 6 involved seven servants because that particular situation called for seven. It does not establish seven as the required number of deacons for every church. Nor do we intend to create a formula such as: *one deacon for every certain number of members*. The number of active deacons should be related to the needs of the congregation and the number of biblically qualified servants God provides.

Again, **qualification is more important than filling a quota**. As needs increase and qualified servants are recognized, the deacon body can grow.

What Will Make This Different?

The difference should not primarily be measured by the number of people holding the title. It should be measured by whether deacons are **actively serving according to a clearly understood ministry purpose**.

Our desire is for the role to be concrete: **Deacons identify needs. Deacons help meet needs. Deacons organize others to meet needs. Deacons help ensure vulnerable people aren't overlooked. Deacons assist with mercy and benevolence. Deacons help solve practical problems. Deacons help protect unity through service.**

This gives deacons a meaningful ministry rather than simply an institutional position.

Paul writes: **“For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”** — 1 Timothy 3:13

Scripture treats faithful diaconal service as honorable and significant. **So should we.**

How Will Deacons Be Accountable?

Deacons remain accountable in several ways. First, they remain accountable to the **biblical qualifications** of 1 Timothy 3. Those qualifications do not cease to matter after someone is affirmed. Second, deacons serve within the **spiritual oversight of the elders**. Third, active deacons serve alongside and are accountable to **one another** in carrying out the responsibilities entrusted to them. And fourth, they remain accountable to the **congregation that affirmed them**.

The proposed structure does not create an independent deacon board functioning as a separate center of authority. Rather: **Elders shepherd. Deacons serve. And both serve the same congregation under the authority of Christ.**

Can Women Serve as Deacons?

This submitted question deserves careful attention because **1 Timothy 3:11 is genuinely an interpretive question**, and faithful Bible-believing Christians have reached different conclusions about it.

After describing male deacons in verses 8–10, Paul writes: **“Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.”** — 1 Timothy 3:11, ESV. There is an important translation issue here. The Greek word translated **“wives”** is *gynaikas*. Depending upon context, the word can mean either **women** or **wives**.

There is no separate Greek word exclusively meaning “wife.” Context determines the meaning. That is why some English translations render the verse: **“In the same way, the women...”** while others render it: **“Their wives likewise...”** So, the submitted question correctly identifies a genuine interpretive issue.

Why Do Some Christians Believe This Refers to Female Deacons?

There are several reasons. Paul says “likewise,” which resembles the transition he used when moving from overseers to deacons in verse 8. He gives these women character qualifications. And Romans 16:1 describes Phoebe using the word *diakonos*: **“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant [diakonos] of the church at Cenchreae.”**

Because *diakonos* can mean either a general servant/minister or someone occupying the office of deacon depending upon context, some interpreters understand Phoebe as a female deacon. Those are legitimate exegetical observations and should not simply be dismissed.

Why Do Other Christians Understand Verse 11 to Refer to Deacons' Wives?

The surrounding context also provides reasons for that interpretation. Immediately after verse 11, Paul returns to male deacons: **“Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.”** — 1 Timothy 3:12

This closely parallels the household qualification Paul previously gave overseers in verses 2–5. For that reason, many interpreters understand verse 11 as addressing **women closely connected to the ministry of male deacons—particularly their wives.**

That would make practical sense in ministries involving mercy, care, households, widows, and other potentially sensitive situations where a deacon's wife might appropriately participate in ministry alongside him.

Romans 16:1 does not by itself settle the question either, because Paul uses *diakonos* broadly elsewhere for servants and ministers who were not necessarily holding the formal office of deacon.

Where Will First Baptist Land?

We recognize that faithful, conservative, Bible-believing Christians disagree about whether 1 Timothy 3:11 refers to female deacons or to the wives of male deacons.

If First Baptist understands verse 11 as referring to deacons' wives and maintains the office of deacon for qualified men, that position rests upon our reading of 1 Timothy 3:8–13 as a whole—not upon a belief that women are less capable, less spiritual, or less valuable to the ministry of the church.

And importantly, women should continue to have enormous opportunities for meaningful service, mercy ministry, care, discipleship, teaching, administration, missions, hospitality, and ministry leadership throughout the church.

The office question is: **What does Scripture authorize us to call and affirm as a deacon?** It is not: *“Can women serve Christ significantly in this congregation?”* To that second question, the biblical answer is unquestionably: **Yes.**

We recognize that faithful interpreters differ over the meaning of 1 Timothy 3:11. After considering the passage as a whole, including Paul's description of the deacon as “the husband of one wife” in verse 12, we understand the office of deacon to be entrusted to qualified men. That is the practice we intend to continue at First Baptist.

The Principle Behind Diaconal Ministry

The proposed structure is not designed to make deacons less important. **It is intended to make their biblical service more clearly defined and more meaningful.** Acts 6 gives us a compelling picture: A need arises. The congregation recognizes qualified servants. Responsibility is entrusted to them. People receive care. Potential division is addressed. Spiritual leaders remain devoted to their calling.

And: **“the word of God continued to increase.”** — Acts 6:7. That is what we want. **Elders shepherd the flock. Deacons serve the flock. Members minister to one another. And together the church advances the gospel.**

A deacon's influence should not come primarily from the authority of his position. It should come from **the faithfulness of his service.**

Jesus Himself established that pattern: **“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”** — Mark 10:45

Christian service does not begin with the deacons. It begins with Jesus. And deacons have the privilege of making that servant-hearted leadership visible within the life of His church.

Question 6 — How Will Ministry Teams, Events, and Congregational Service Work?

Questions Submitted

- What will be the process for acquiring help for events and activities?
- Will the elders appoint groups to handle specific needs such as children, decorating, audio/visual, finances, Sunday School, etc.?
- How is that different from committees or teams?
- If decisions will be made by the elders, how will the congregation use its spiritual giftedness in the work of the Body of Christ?
- Isn't the work of the leaders of the church “to equip the members for the work of ministry?”
- If the church no longer operates through a large standing-committee structure, how will ministry actually get done?

Are We Eliminating People Serving Together? No.

This may be one of the most important practical clarifications in the entire proposal. Moving away from a standing-committee governance structure does **not** mean moving away from teams of people serving together.

As we said in Question 3: **Removing layers of governance does not mean removing layers of ministry.** In fact, we hope the opposite occurs.

Our desire is for **more people to discover their gifts, find places where God is working, and serve meaningfully in the life and mission of the church.**

Paul writes: **“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.”** — Romans 12:6

Peter similarly says: **“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.”** — 1 Peter 4:10

The biblical expectation is not merely that members attend meetings. **The biblical expectation is that members minister.**

Isn't the Job of Church Leaders to Equip Members for Ministry?

Yes. Exactly. The question itself points us directly to Ephesians 4.

Christ gives leaders to His church: **“to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.”** — Ephesians 4:12

Notice who performs the work of ministry. **The saints—the members of the church.** Leaders equip. Members minister. Paul then describes the goal: **“when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”** — Ephesians 4:16. That is precisely what we want to encourage.

The proposed structure isn't intended to move ministry **away from the congregation and toward the elders.** It is intended to move elders toward their biblical work of **shepherding and equipping** and members toward their biblical work of **serving and ministering.**

Elder leadership should produce more congregational ministry, not less.

What Happens to Committees?

This is where terminology matters. There is nothing inherently unbiblical about a group of church members sitting around a table and calling themselves a **committee.** The issue is not the word.

The issue is **what responsibility that group has been given and how it relates to the overall leadership of the church.**

Under the proposed structure, we envision greater use of **ministry teams** rather than maintaining numerous standing committees as independent layers of church governance. A ministry team exists primarily to **accomplish ministry**.

For example:

A Children's Ministry Team helps provide safe, effective, gospel-centered ministry to children.

A Worship/AV Team helps facilitate gathered worship through music, sound, projection, livestreaming, and technical support.

A Hospitality Team helps welcome people and create environments in which relationships can develop.

A Property Team can help coordinate maintenance and practical facility needs.

A Finance Team assists with offering counts, records, financial reporting, preparation and monitoring of the Ministry Support Plan, and financial accountability.

An Event Team might form specifically to plan and execute a particular ministry event.

Some teams may operate continually. Others may exist for a season. Others may form around a particular need and conclude when the work is completed. That flexibility is intentional.

How Is a Ministry Team Different From a Committee?

The biggest difference is not necessarily what happens when people gather. It is **purpose and authority**. A traditional standing committee can easily become a permanent governing structure: *This is our area. These decisions belong to us. These people were elected to control this part of the church.*

A ministry team begins from a different question: **“What ministry needs to be accomplished, and who has the gifts, interest, experience, and availability to help accomplish it?”**

That shifts the emphasis from **position to service**.

A team does not need independent governing authority in order to have meaningful responsibility. For example, our Finance Team can perform enormously important work without functioning as an independent governing board over the finances of the church.

Likewise, a Children's Ministry Team can have substantial responsibility for carrying out children's ministry without independently governing the church.

So: Committees have often been organized around institutional jurisdiction. Ministry teams will be organized around ministry responsibility. That is the distinction we are trying to make.

Will Elders Appoint All the Teams?

Not necessarily in the sense that every person who serves must first be individually selected by the elders. That would recreate the very problem we're trying to avoid by making elders responsible for every ministry detail.

Elders will provide **oversight**, but ministry leaders should be empowered to recruit, organize, and develop people within their ministries. For example, if someone is leading an event, that person should be able to say: *"I need three people to help with setup, two people to greet, someone to help with food, and several people to clean up afterward."*

We don't need an elder meeting to approve every volunteer. Likewise, ministry leaders can invite people to serve based upon their gifts and interests. Elders become more directly involved where matters of doctrine, significant leadership, safety, church-wide direction, finances, or other areas of oversight require it.

Again: **Oversight does not require micromanagement.**

How Will We Get Help for Events and Activities?

Primarily by **inviting the congregation to serve**. When a ministry opportunity arises, we can communicate the need clearly and allow people to respond according to their gifts, interests, and availability. Sometimes a ministry leader may personally recruit people.

Sometimes there may be a church-wide invitation. Sometimes an existing ministry team will already have people prepared to serve. Sometimes a temporary team may form around one particular event. This allows us to ask a much healthier question than: *“Which committee is responsible for this?”* We can ask: **“What needs to be done, and whom has God equipped to help us do it?”**

That is much closer to the body imagery of the New Testament. Paul writes: **“For the body does not consist of one member but of many.”**
— 1 Corinthians 12:14

And: **“God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose.”** — 1 Corinthians 12:18

Different people bring different gifts. Ministry should make room for those gifts to be used.

Does Someone Have to Wait Until They Are Asked?

No. This is an important cultural shift we hope to encourage. Certainly, ministry leaders should invite people to serve. Part of leadership is recognizing gifts in others and giving them opportunities. But Christian service should not depend entirely upon receiving a personal invitation.

First Peter 4:10 does not say: *“If someone eventually asks you to use your gift, consider doing so.”* It says: **“As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another.”** Members should be encouraged to ask: **Where is God already working? What needs do I see? What gifts has God given me? What burdens or ministries particularly resonate with me? Where can I join others who are already serving?**

Sometimes ministry begins because someone simply sees a need and says: **“I can help with that.”** That kind of initiative should be encouraged.

What If Someone Has an Idea for a New Ministry?

Bring it forward. Talk with an elder or the appropriate ministry leader. The goal isn't to create unnecessary hurdles between a member and ministry.

At the same time, not every idea automatically becomes an official church ministry. Some ideas require consideration of doctrine; mission and priorities; leadership; volunteers; finances; facilities; scheduling; child or vulnerable-person safety; insurance or liability; and whether the ministry duplicates something already happening. Those are legitimate stewardship questions.

The process should be **accessible without being careless**. A member should be able to say: *“God has put this ministry opportunity on my heart. Could we talk about it?”* And leaders should be willing to listen.

What About the Committees That Already Exist?

Existing groups that are actively serving and performing useful ministry do not need to disappear simply because the governance structure changes. We've already discussed the Finance Team as an example. Other functioning teams can continue where their ministry remains useful and consistent with the new structure.

The larger change is that we will no longer need to maintain a large number of standing committees simply because the organizational chart says those committees must exist. Instead, teams can be formed and maintained **because there is actual ministry for them to accomplish**. That allows the structure to serve ministry rather than requiring ministry to serve the structure.

What If a Team Stops Meeting or Its Ministry Is No Longer Needed?

Then we don't have to keep it alive artificially. That's one of the advantages of a ministry-team model. If the need changes, the team can change. If the ministry concludes, the team can conclude. If a new need arises, a new team can form. Paul's body imagery is helpful because a living body is not static. **“When each part is working properly...”** — Ephesians 4:16

The emphasis is on **functioning**, not merely existing. A name on an organizational chart is not ministry.

Ministry is people actually using their gifts to serve Christ and one another.

Will Members Still Have Meaningful Responsibility?

Absolutely. And this may be one of the places where we should distinguish between **authority and responsibility**. Someone does not need governing authority over a ministry in order to carry significant responsibility within it. A Sunday School teacher has meaningful responsibility. A children's worker has meaningful responsibility. A worship leader has meaningful responsibility. A Finance Team member has meaningful responsibility. Someone coordinating benevolence has meaningful responsibility. A person leading an event has meaningful responsibility. A volunteer visiting homebound members has meaningful responsibility. A person discipling another believer has meaningful responsibility.

Meaningful ministry does not require institutional control.

Jesus Himself tells us how greatness in His kingdom should be measured:

“Whoever would be great among you must be your servant.”

— Mark 10:43

Influence in Christ's church should therefore increasingly be measured by **faithful service rather than organizational position.**

What Are We Trying to Accomplish?

We aren't trying to replace: **many committees with a few elders who do everything.** That would be a failure. We're trying to move toward: **a plurality of elders who shepherd, deacons who serve, ministry leaders who lead, teams that accomplish ministry, and members who use their gifts.**

Ephesians 4 gives us the picture: **Christ gives leaders. Leaders equip the saints. The saints do the work of ministry. Every part contributes. And the body grows.**

That is why the question: *“If decisions will be made by elders, how will members use their spiritual gifts?”* has a very encouraging answer: **By doing ministry.** Voting is one way a congregation exercises responsibility.

It is not the primary way Christians exercise their spiritual gifts.

We want to create as many opportunities as possible for members to move beyond merely occupying positions or attending meetings and into the actual work of teaching, serving, giving, encouraging, leading, showing mercy, practicing hospitality, discipling, caring, evangelizing, and making disciples.

The Principle Behind Ministry Teams

Perhaps the simplest way to summarize the proposed change is:

Structure should support ministry. Ministry should not exist to support structure. We will continue to need organization. We will continue to need meetings. We will continue to need teams. We will continue to need leaders. We will continue to need accountability. But those things are **tools for ministry**, not the ministry itself.

Paul gives us the goal: **“When each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”** — Ephesians 4:16

That's what we want to see: **Not fewer people involved. More people involved. Not fewer gifts being used. More gifts being used. Not ministry concentrated in the hands of elders. Ministry multiplied throughout the congregation.** The proposed structure is not designed to reduce congregational participation. **It is designed to redirect congregational participation toward the work of ministry itself.**

Question 7 — How Will the Transition and Implementation Process Work?

Questions Submitted

- Will the Transition Team have men and women?
- Who will chair the Transition Team?
- How will the initial transition take place?
- How will the new Constitution and Bylaws be developed?
- When will the practical details of the new structure be determined?
- How will the congregation be involved before the new structure takes effect?

What Is the Purpose of the Transition Team?

The Transition Team has a **specific and temporary assignment: To work through the constitutional and bylaw changes necessary to implement the polity model affirmed by the congregation.**

It is not intended to become another permanent committee. It will not function as the elders. It will not govern the church during the transition. It will not independently select the future elders or deacons. And it will not have authority to change the church's governing documents on its own. Its work is much more focused.

If the congregation affirms the proposed polity, someone must then take the principles we have been teaching and translate them into clear governing language. That means working through practical questions such as: elder qualifications and selection procedures; congregational affirmation of elders; deacon nomination, examination, and affirmation; elder accountability and removal; congregational authority and voting requirements; financial authority and expenditure limits; the Ministry Support Plan; membership and discipline; congregational meetings; ministry teams; officer responsibilities; and other procedural details necessary for the church to operate clearly and responsibly.

Many of the questions submitted for this Q&A will therefore help inform the work of the Transition Team.

Who Will Serve on the Transition Team?

We are not creating an entirely new group from scratch. We intend to use the **remaining members of the existing Constitution and Bylaws Committee**, together with the pastors presently serving in the elder/shepherding role, Pastor Craig and Pastor Jason.

That is a natural group for this particular assignment because the task is specifically related to revising the Constitution and Bylaws. The congregation is therefore not being asked to create another broad governing body.

The Transition Team is simply a temporary working group with a defined assignment: **Prepare the governing-document changes necessary to implement the structure the congregation has affirmed.**

Once that work has been completed and the transition accomplished, **the Transition Team's assignment is finished.**

Will the Transition Team Include Men and Women?

The Transition Team is **not an elder body**, so the biblical qualifications concerning the office of elder do not apply to membership on this team. Its purpose is constitutional and organizational rather than pastoral oversight.

Therefore, there is no biblical reason that women could not participate in this work. The composition will be based upon the remaining membership of the Constitution and Bylaws Committee together with Pastor Craig and Pastor Jason.

This is another helpful distinction between **church office** and **ministry responsibility**. Restricting the office of elder to qualified men does not mean that every group, team, ministry, or organizational responsibility within the church must consist only of men.

Who Will Chair the Transition Team?

Because this is a temporary working group rather than a permanent governing body, the question of a “chair” is primarily an organizational matter. The team can determine the most effective way to organize its work as it begins meeting.

What matters more than the title of chair is that the group has a clear assignment, works cooperatively, keeps the congregation informed, and produces a proposed Constitution and Bylaws for congregational consideration. We do not need to create an additional position of authority simply for the sake of having one.

What Happens If the Congregation Affirms the Proposed Model?

Affirming the polity model is not the same thing as instantly implementing every detail of the new structure.

The congregation is first being asked whether it believes we should move forward toward the model we have presented: **Jesus-ruled, elder-led, deacon-served, congregationally engaged and accountable, and gospel-focused.**

If the congregation says **yes**, then the Transition Team begins the work of translating that model into the governing documents necessary to implement it responsibly.

In other words: **First we decide where we are going.**

Then we carefully establish how we will operate when we get there. That is why some questions in this document have answers such as: *“The precise procedure will be established in the revised Constitution and Bylaws.”* That isn't avoiding the question. It is recognizing that **the church should not invent constitutional details before the congregation has even authorized us to proceed with the model.**

Will the Transition Team Be Able to Change the Constitution on Its Own?

No. This is one of the most important safeguards in the entire transition. The Transition Team will **draft and recommend** changes. It will not possess the authority to enact them.

The proposed governing documents will ultimately have to be presented to the congregation according to the church's established requirements for constitutional and bylaw changes.

The process is not: **Congregation approves elders → elders rewrite everything → new structure takes effect.**

Rather, it is: **Congregation affirms the direction → Transition Team develops the necessary governing documents → proposed documents are made available for congregational review → questions and necessary refinements can be addressed → congregation votes on the governing documents → implementation follows congregational approval.**

The congregation therefore remains meaningfully involved in the transition.

Why Aren't All the Details Already Written?

Because there is a difference between **biblical principles** and **organizational procedures**. Scripture tells us that churches should have qualified elders. Scripture gives us their qualifications. Scripture describes their shepherding responsibilities. Scripture identifies deacons and gives their qualifications. Scripture gives meaningful responsibilities to the congregation. Scripture teaches us that leaders equip members for ministry. Those are biblical principles.

But Scripture does not tell us: exactly how many days must pass between nomination and affirmation; the precise wording of a ballot; the dollar amount requiring congregational authorization; how frequently regular business meetings must occur; how financial reports should be formatted; what percentage constitutes a particular procedural vote; or many other administrative details. Those are matters of **wisdom and orderly implementation**.

Paul writes: **“But all things should be done decently and in order.”**
— 1 Corinthians 14:40

The Constitution and Bylaws exist partly to establish that order.

Where Scripture speaks, **Scripture governs us**. Where Scripture leaves procedural details open, **we should exercise wisdom and establish clear, accountable procedures**.

Will the Congregation See the Proposed Changes Before Voting?

Yes. The congregation will have an opportunity to know what it is being asked to approve. The Transition Team's work will not be treated as a confidential document revealed only at the moment of a vote.

Proposed governing changes will be made available so members can read them, understand them, ask appropriate questions, and know how the proposed structure will actually operate before being asked to approve the final documents.

What Will Happen During the Transition?

The church will continue functioning. Worship continues. Biblical Community continues. Ministries continue. Ministry Teams currently serving continue their work. Staff continue their responsibilities. Members continue serving. The existing governing documents remain operative until properly amended.

What Is the Transition Team *Not*?

Because the word “team” can sometimes create confusion, it may help to state this plainly. The Transition Team is not: **a new elder board; a replacement congregation; a permanent leadership body; a group empowered to rewrite the Constitution without congregational approval; a search committee for elders; or a group being given ongoing authority over the church.**

It is a **temporary working group assigned to constitutional revision**. Once that assignment is complete, the team concludes.

Why Take This Approach?

Because changing a church's polity should be done carefully. Proverbs says:

“Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.” — Proverbs 15:22

And the process we've already undertaken reflects that principle. This proposal did not begin a few weeks ago. It developed through years of conversation, biblical study, consultation, and increasingly broader discussion among church leaders and members.

Now the congregation is being given extensive teaching, written resources, opportunities to ask questions, and ultimately the responsibility to decide whether to proceed. If the congregation affirms that direction, the next stage should demonstrate the same care.

Study Scripture. Develop the documents. Communicate clearly. Allow the congregation to review them. Answer questions. Make appropriate refinements. Ask the congregation to approve them. Then implement what has been approved.

The Principle Behind the Transition

We are trying to distinguish between two questions:

1. Is this the biblical direction we believe our church should pursue?

and:

2. What specific constitutional procedures will allow us to pursue that direction faithfully, wisely, and accountably?

The first question is what has driven the teaching and discussion surrounding the proposed polity. The second is the work that follows congregational affirmation. And importantly: **The Transition Team does not have the final word. The congregation does.**

The team prepares. The team recommends. The team explains. **The congregation approves the governing documents.** That allows us to make the transition carefully while preserving both meaningful elder leadership and meaningful congregational accountability.

The goal isn't merely to produce a new organizational chart. **The goal is to establish a structure that helps us faithfully live out what Scripture teaches about Christ's church.**

Question 8 — Is This Model Biblical, and If It Is, Why Would We Choose a Different Model?

Questions Underneath This Question

Throughout the questions we have received, there have been understandable concerns about how the proposed structure will work:

- How will elders be selected?
- What authority will they have?
- What authority will the congregation retain?
- What will deacons do?
- How will members use their gifts?
- How will finances be handled?
- How will ministry teams function?
- How will leaders remain accountable?
- How will the transition occur?

Those are important questions, and we have attempted to answer them carefully throughout this document. But underneath all of those practical questions is an even more fundamental question:

Is the model we are proposing biblical?

And if the answer to that question is **yes**, then we need to ask a second question: **If this is the pattern Scripture gives us, why would we intentionally choose a different pattern?**

Is This Model Biblical?

Yes. We believe the structure we are proposing reflects the pattern and principles for church leadership that we see throughout the New Testament.

Christ rules His church.

Paul writes: **“And he is the head of the body, the church.”**

— Colossians 1:18

The church ultimately belongs neither to pastors nor elders nor deacons nor committees nor the congregation. **The church belongs to Jesus.** He purchased it with His blood (Acts 20:28). He is its Head (Ephesians 5:23). He is its Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4). Our polity begins with:

Jesus-ruled.

Elders shepherd His church. Paul and Barnabas: “**appointed elders for them in every church.**” — Acts 14:23. Paul instructs Titus:

“**appoint elders in every town as I directed you.**” — Titus 1:5. Paul calls the elders of the Ephesian church and tells them: “**Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.**” — Acts 20:28

Peter tells elders: “**Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight.**” — 1 Peter 5:2. **Elder-led.**

Deacons serve His church.

Paul recognizes the two offices when he addresses: “**all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.**” — Philippians 1:1

First Timothy 3 likewise gives qualifications first for overseers and then for deacons. And Acts 6 provides the important pattern we have discussed throughout this process: qualified servants addressing practical needs so that spiritual leaders can remain devoted to prayer and the ministry of the Word. **Deacon-served.**

The congregation remains meaningfully responsible. Jesus involves the church in discipline: “**tell it to the church.**” — Matthew 18:17

Paul addresses the assembled congregation in Corinth concerning discipline and restoration (1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 2). The churches themselves are responsible for guarding the gospel (Galatians 1:6–9).

Believers are commanded to exercise their gifts: “**As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another.**” — 1 Peter 4:10

And Ephesians describes a healthy church as one in which: “**each part is working properly.**” — Ephesians 4:16

So: **Congregationally engaged and accountable.**

And everything is ordered around the gospel.

Paul tells Timothy: “**guard the good deposit entrusted to you.**”

— 2 Timothy 1:14. The church does not exist primarily to preserve an institution, maintain an organizational structure, or perpetuate a particular way of doing things. **We exist to make disciples and faithfully proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.**

So: **Gospel-focused.**

Put together, that is the model we have been describing:

****Jesus-ruled. Elder-led. Deacon-served. Congregationally engaged and accountable. Gospel-focused.****

Are We Claiming This Is the Only Faithful Church Structure?

Scripture does not provide a complete modern Constitution and Bylaws. It does not tell us how many regular business meetings to have, what dollar amount requires a congregational vote, how ministry teams should be named, or how long an elder examination process should take. There is legitimate room for wisdom in those matters.

But there is a difference between **procedural flexibility** and **biblical principle**. We believe Scripture is sufficiently clear that: **Christ is the Head of His church. Qualified elders shepherd and oversee the church. There is a plurality of elders. Qualified deacons serve the church. Members exercise their gifts and do the work of ministry. The congregation retains meaningful biblical responsibilities. Leaders equip the saints rather than attempting to perform all ministry themselves.**

Those convictions are what we are attempting to build into our governing structure.

Why Change Anything?

Because once we become convinced that Scripture gives us a better pattern, faithfulness requires us to take that conviction seriously.

Paul tells Timothy: **“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”** — 2 Timothy 3:16

Scripture doesn't merely affirm us. Sometimes **Scripture corrects us**. Sometimes it causes us to reconsider assumptions. Sometimes it challenges practices we inherited. Sometimes it asks us to distinguish between: **“This is what the Bible teaches”** and: **“This is simply how we have always done it.”**

Tradition is not inherently bad. Experience is valuable. History matters. Wisdom matters. But none of those things possesses the authority of Scripture.

Jesus warns about allowing human tradition to displace God's Word: **“You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.”** — Mark 7:8

We certainly do not want to suggest that every tradition is wrong. Many traditions are beautiful, wise, and helpful. But **tradition must always remain underneath Scripture**.

What If the Biblical Pattern Is Uncomfortable?

That is perhaps the harder question. A biblical model does not automatically become comfortable simply because we recognize it as biblical. Change can be difficult. Questions are appropriate. Careful examination is appropriate. Wanting safeguards is appropriate. Wanting accountability is appropriate. The Bereans were commended because: **“they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.”** — Acts 17:11

That is exactly what we should do. **Examine what has been proposed against Scripture**. Don't affirm it merely because Pastor Craig or Pastor Jason recommends it. Don't reject it merely because it differs from something familiar. Open the Bible. Read the passages. Test the teaching.

Ask: **Is this what Scripture teaches?** That is the standard we should all be willing to accept.

Scripture Must Be Allowed to Challenge Our Structure

This is particularly important because Scripture has been raised in several of the submitted questions. **Good.** That is exactly where the discussion should happen. If someone believes the proposed structure contradicts Scripture, then we should examine the passage together.

If our interpretation is wrong, **Scripture should correct us.** But the reverse must also be true.

If Scripture challenges a structure, expectation, tradition, or preference that we are accustomed to, then **we must allow Scripture to correct that too.** We cannot use the Bible merely as a tool for defending the structure we already prefer.

We have to place **every structure—including the one we are proposing—underneath the authority of God's Word.**

That is why the ultimate question isn't: *“Which structure do I personally prefer?”* or: *“Which structure am I most comfortable with?”* or even: *“Which structure have we used before?”*

The more important question is: **“Which structure most faithfully reflects what we see in Scripture?”**

What Are We Actually Asking the Church to Do?

We are not asking the congregation to place blind trust in a handful of men. We are asking the congregation to place its confidence in **the sufficiency and authority of Scripture.**

We are not asking: *“Do you trust Craig and Jason enough to give them more authority?”* That would be the wrong question. Pastors come and go. Elders come and go. Deacons come and go. Congregations change.

But: **“The word of our God will stand forever.”** — Isaiah 40:8

We are trying to establish a structure that does not depend upon the personality of whoever happens to be pastor at a particular moment.

A healthy polity should still be healthy **after the present pastors are gone**. It should provide plurality. Accountability. Clear responsibilities. Biblical qualifications. Congregational involvement. Servant leadership.

And a structure for equipping God's people for ministry.

We Return to Two Questions

After all the pages of explanations, procedures, qualifications, safeguards, questions, and answers, perhaps the entire discussion eventually comes down to two questions.

1. Is this model biblical?

After studying Acts, the Pastoral Epistles, Ephesians, 1 Peter, Hebrews, and the other passages we have examined together, **we believe the answer is yes**.

And therefore:

2. If it is biblical, why would we intentionally ignore the biblical pattern?

That doesn't mean every procedural detail we develop will be directly commanded by Scripture. It doesn't mean we will get every decision right. It doesn't mean elders will be perfect. It doesn't mean deacons will be perfect. It doesn't mean the congregation will be perfect.

No structure can make sinful people perfect.

But we can choose a structure that places us where we believe Scripture places us: **under Christ's rule, shepherded by qualified elders, served by qualified deacons, equipped for ministry as a congregation, accountable to one another, and united around the gospel.**

Our Goal Has Not Changed

From the beginning of this process, we have repeatedly said: **We are not trying something new. We are trying to be faithful to something ancient.**

This is not change for the sake of change. It is not innovation for the sake of innovation. It is not about giving one group more importance and another group less. It is not about diminishing the congregation. It is not about diminishing deacons. And it is not about elevating pastors.

It is about asking a very simple question: **How has Christ instructed His church to order itself?** And then having the courage and humility to follow where Scripture leads us.

Our goal is not innovation.

Our goal is apostolic faithfulness.