

SEEKING TO ALIGN OUR CHURCH WITH SCRIPTURE

A Study Guide for the Proposed Church Governance Transition First Baptist Church of Martinsburg

Dear Church Family,

Over the coming months, our church will be prayerfully considering a proposed transition to a church governance structure that is Jesus-ruled, elder-overseen, deacon-served, congregationally engaged and accountable, and gospel-focused.

This proposal is not the result of a recent conversation or a quick decision. Since the summer of 2025, Pastor Jason and I have been engaged in a season of study, prayer, discussion, and preparation regarding biblical church leadership and governance. During that time, we have met with a number of godly men from within our church as well as trusted denominational leaders and pastors who have helped us think carefully about these matters.

While these conversations have been valuable, our ultimate desire has not been to follow the practices of another church or denomination, but to better understand and apply the teaching of Scripture to the life of our own congregation.

The purpose of this packet is to provide biblical teaching, ministry philosophy, and practical information to help our church family study, pray, ask questions, and thoughtfully consider this proposal. These documents are educational in nature. They do not amend or replace our current Constitution or Bylaws, nor do they themselves establish any changes to our governance structure. Any future constitutional or bylaw revisions would be presented separately for congregational consideration and approval.

We encourage every member to read these materials carefully, search the Scriptures, participate in the teaching opportunities provided, ask questions, and pray for wisdom, unity, and discernment as we seek together to follow Christ and His Word.

Our desire is not simply to adopt a new structure, but to align ourselves more faithfully with the pattern of church leadership, service, and accountability that we believe Scripture presents.

In Christ,

Pastor Craig

Pastor Jason

Presented June 7, 2026

Motion Regarding Proposed Church Governance Transition:

The pastors move that First Baptist Church of Martinsburg enter a period of prayerful study and consideration regarding a proposed transition to a church governance structure that is Jesus-ruled, elder-overseen through a plurality of biblically qualified elders, deacon-served, congregationally engaged and accountable, and gospel-focused.

The pastors further move that this proposal be discussed at the July 27, 2026, business meeting and that consideration of this motion be postponed until a special-called business meeting on September 13, 2026, following the morning worship service, in order to allow sufficient time for congregational study, prayer, teaching, discussion, and reflection.

At the September 13 special-called business meeting, the congregation will be asked to consider whether to move forward with the proposed governance model and whether to affirm a temporary Leadership Transition Team to assist the current pastors in preparing proposed constitutional and bylaw revisions for future congregational consideration and approval.

Proposed Church Governance Transition Timeline

June–July 2026

- Four Sunday morning teaching sessions examining the biblical foundations of church leadership, eldership, deacons, and congregational responsibility.
- Two Sunday evening teaching sessions examining the biblical foundations of church leadership, eldership, deacons, and congregational responsibility
- Distribution of supporting resources and opportunities for feedback.

July 27, 2026 – Regular Business Meeting

- Motion presented and seconded.
- Congregational discussion begins.
- Motion tabled until September 13 to allow additional study, prayer, and discussion.

July 26–August 30, 2026

- Sermon series addressing biblical church leadership, church governance, elder oversight, deacon service, congregational accountability, and the mission of the church.

September 13, 2026 – Special Called Business Meeting

The September 13 vote will not amend the Constitution or Bylaws and will not formally establish the office of elder. Rather, the vote will determine whether the congregation desires to move forward with the proposed governance model and authorize the preparation of constitutional and bylaw revisions for future consideration.

The congregation will be asked to consider two questions:

Question 1:

Do we believe Scripture supports moving First Baptist Church toward a governance structure that

is Jesus-ruled, elder-overseen, deacon-served, congregationally engaged and accountable, and gospel-focused?

Question 2:

Do we affirm the proposed Leadership Transition Team, recommended by the pastors and presented to the congregation, to assist in guiding this process by preparing and presenting proposed constitutional and bylaw revisions necessary to implement this governance model for future congregational consideration?

Following September 13

- Leadership Transition Team develops proposed constitutional and bylaw revisions.
- Draft revisions are distributed according to constitutional requirements.
- Additional opportunities for congregational review and feedback are provided.
- Constitutional and bylaw revisions are presented at a future business meeting for congregational approval.

Final Step

- If constitutional revisions are approved, elders are then formally nominated, elected, and installed according to the newly adopted governing documents.

Biblical Foundations for Church Leadership and Governance

First Baptist Church of Martinsburg

At First Baptist Church of Martinsburg, we desire to structure our life together in a way that is faithful to the teaching and pattern of Scripture. The New Testament does not give a single “policy manual” for church governance, but it does reveal consistent principles for how local churches are led, served, and held accountable.

Below is a summary of key biblical foundations for the proposed governance structure.

1. Christ Is the Head of the Church

All church leadership exists under the authority of Jesus Christ.

- Colossians 1:18
- Ephesians 1:22–23
- Matthew 28:18–20
- John 10:14–16

Summary: Jesus alone is the head and chief shepherd of the church. All leaders serve under His authority.

2. Churches Were Led by a Plurality of Elders

Local churches in the New Testament were consistently overseen by multiple elders.

- Acts 14:23
- Acts 20:17, 28
- Titus 1:5–9
- 1 Peter 5:1–3
- James 5:14

Summary: Leadership in the early church was shared among a team of qualified elders who shepherded the congregation.

3. Elders Are Defined by Character and Shepherding

Leadership is rooted in spiritual maturity and servant-hearted care.

- 1 Timothy 3:1–7
- Titus 1:5–9
- 1 Peter 5:2–3

Summary: Elders are called to shepherd God’s people with humility, integrity, and faithfulness.

4. The Church Participates in Key Decisions

The congregation is not passive but actively involved in accountability and discernment.

- Acts 6:1–6
- Acts 15:22
- Matthew 18:15–17
- 1 Corinthians 5:1–5, 12–13
- 2 Corinthians 2:6

Summary: The church as a whole participates in important decisions, discipline, and leadership affirmation.

5. Deacons Serve the Mission and Unity of the Church

Deacons are biblically qualified servants who help care for practical needs and support the church's ministry. Acts 6:1–7

- 1 Timothy 3:8–13

Summary: Deacons serve the church so that elders can focus on prayer, teaching, and shepherding.

6. Leadership Is Accountable and Guarded by Scripture

Church leaders are responsible to God and bound by His Word.

- Hebrews 13:17
- Acts 20:28–31
- 1 Peter 5:3

Summary: Biblical leadership is real leadership—but always accountable, never authoritarian.

Summary Statement

The proposed governance structure seeks to reflect this New Testament pattern:

- Christ as the head of the church
- A plurality of biblically qualified elders for spiritual oversight
- Deacons serving the practical needs of the church
- The congregation engaged in discernment and accountability
- All leadership functioning under the authority of Scripture

Q&A Section

1. “Are you trying to take authority away from the congregation?”

The congregation retains meaningful responsibilities of affirmation, accountability, and participation in matters entrusted to it by Scripture, while elders are charged with the ongoing oversight and shepherding of the church.

2. “Does this mean pastors will have more control?”

No. The goal is shared spiritual oversight under Christ. A plurality of biblically qualified elders shepherd the church together with accountability to the congregation and under the authority of Scripture.

3. “Isn’t this just copying another denomination?”

No. The goal is not to adopt a tradition but to reflect the pattern of leadership and accountability we see in the New Testament church.

4. “Where do deacons fit in this model?”

Deacons continue their vital role of serving the practical needs of the church, caring for people, and supporting the ministry so that elders can focus on prayer, teaching, and shepherding.

5. “What if we have questions or concerns about the direction?”

This is why the church is entering a season of teaching, discussion, prayer, and congregational engagement. The goal is careful, unified discernment under Scripture, not rushed decision-making.

6. “What about the committees?”

Our committees have served this church faithfully for many years. They’ve helped us care for needs, make decisions, and organize ministry. We are grateful for that service.

What is changing is not the importance of those responsibilities, but where we believe those responsibilities are best stewarded biblically.

Committees tend to divide responsibility into **functional silos** (finance, personnel, deacons, etc.). Elders bring those responsibilities into **integrated spiritual oversight**.

Instead of separate committees carrying portions of oversight in isolation, the New Testament pattern shows a plurality of elders who together carry the spiritual oversight of the whole church—teaching, shepherding, protecting doctrine, and giving unified direction.

The goal is not less participation by church members, but clearer biblical oversight and greater unity in carrying out the mission Christ has given His church.

Leadership: Elders, Deacons, and Congregational Care

Introduction

At First Baptist Martinsburg, we strive to be a church that is Jesus-ruled, elder-led, deacon-served, congregationally engaged and accountable, and gospel-focused.

Jesus Christ is the Head of His church. He alone possesses ultimate authority, and He alone determines the mission, direction, and priorities of His people. Through His Word, God has revealed everything necessary for the faith and practice of His church, and through His Spirit He guides us in faithful obedience. Everything we do must flow from His authority and align with His purposes.

In His wisdom, Christ has chosen to accomplish His mission through His people. The New Testament teaches that the congregation bears a significant responsibility in the life of the church. As a gathered body of believers, we worship together, share in the ordinances, devote ourselves to the teaching of Scripture, encourage one another in discipleship, and proclaim the gospel to the world.

Like any family or community, the church requires leadership. Under Christ's authority, God has entrusted specific responsibilities to elders and deacons. These leaders do not possess authority independent of Christ or apart from the congregation. Rather, they serve under Christ and remain accountable to the church. The congregation entrusts them with leadership and service, and they steward that trust through faithful, humble ministry.

When both leaders and members fulfill their God-given responsibilities, the church flourishes.

A Simple Summary

While elders provide spiritual oversight and deacons provide practical service and care, the congregation continues to play an essential role in the life of the church. Scripture presents a pattern of godly leadership, faithful service, and congregational participation working together under the headship of Jesus Christ.

In accordance with the pattern of the New Testament, First Baptist Martinsburg recognizes two biblical offices within the local church: elders and deacons.

Elders

Who They Are

The New Testament uses the terms elder, pastor, and overseer interchangeably to describe the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-4). These three titles emphasize different aspects of the same calling.

An elder is spiritually mature (elder), shepherds God's people (pastor), and watches over the doctrine and direction of the church (overseer).

In short, elders are charged with providing spiritual leadership and oversight to the church.

The qualifications for elders are found primarily in 1 Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9, and 1 Peter 5:1-5. These passages emphasize character far more than giftedness. Elders are expected to be above reproach, self-controlled, hospitable, faithful in their homes, respected by others, grounded in sound doctrine, and devoted to Christ.

Unlike deacons, elders are specifically required to be "able to teach" (1 Timothy 3:2). Throughout the New Testament, elders bear a unique responsibility to teach God's Word, guard the church from false doctrine, and lead God's people in truth.

The New Testament consistently presents churches being led by a plurality of elders rather than a single individual. This pattern appears throughout Acts, the Epistles, and the writings of Peter and James. Shared eldership provides accountability, wisdom, and mutual encouragement among church leaders while helping ensure that no single individual bears the responsibility of spiritual oversight alone.

Prospective elders undergo a careful process of examination. Their character, doctrine, family life, service, leadership ability, and commitment to the church are all evaluated according to Scripture. The office of elder is not a reward for success or popularity but a calling that carries significant responsibility and accountability before God.

The Role of Women and the Office of Elder

We believe Scripture reserves the office of elder for qualified men. While faithful Christians have reached different conclusions on this subject, we believe passages such as 1 Timothy 2:12 and 1 Timothy 3:1-7 establish this pattern for the church.

At the same time, we affirm the indispensable ministry of women within the life of the church. Women are called to use their God-given gifts in discipleship, evangelism, prayer, teaching, hospitality, service, mercy ministry, and leadership throughout the congregation.

Our goal is not to limit ministry opportunities but to follow the pattern and boundaries that we believe Scripture establishes while encouraging every believer to fully exercise his or her gifts for the glory of God and the good of the church.

What Elders Do

Scripture calls elders to:

- Lead the church (1 Timothy 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:1-2)
- Teach and preach God's Word (1 Timothy 3:2; Titus 1:9)
- Guard the church from false teaching (Acts 20:28-31)
- Pray for the sick (James 5:14)
- Provide wisdom and guidance in matters of doctrine and ministry (Acts 15)
- Lead in areas of ministry and administration (1 Tim. 5:17)

Although every Christian shares responsibility for prayer, discipleship, and protecting sound doctrine, elders carry a unique responsibility to lead in these areas on behalf of the congregation.

Elders are expected to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word. They shepherd the congregation through teaching, discipleship, visitation, counseling, crisis care, baptism, communion, and leadership development.

They also lead by example. Their authority is not rooted primarily in position but in faithful Christian character. As they follow Christ, they invite others to follow their example.

The congregation entrusts elders with spiritual oversight and leadership, and elders remain accountable both to Christ and to the church. Elders are called to lead with humility and servant-heartedness, never lording authority over God's people but serving as examples to the flock. Members should respect and support the leadership of the elders, while also exercising biblical discernment and lovingly addressing concerns when necessary.

Deacons

Who They Are

The word deacon simply means "servant."

Deacons are servant leaders who help meet the practical needs of the church so that the ministry of the Word, prayer, discipleship, and care can flourish. They work closely alongside the elders in building up the body of Christ.

The ministry pattern associated with deacons is first seen in Acts 6 and the qualifications for deacons are found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. Like elders, deacons are expected to demonstrate exemplary Christian character. They are to be respected, sincere, faithful, self-controlled, and committed to sound doctrine.

The emphasis of Scripture is not on talent or professional expertise but on spiritual maturity and godly character.

Those who serve the church, whether as elders or deacons, must first demonstrate a life submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

What Deacons Do

The first deacons appear to have been appointed in Acts 6 to help care for widows and oversee practical ministry needs within the church.

Today, the specific responsibilities of deacons vary according to the needs of the congregation, but their mission remains the same: they help ensure that the church is cared for practically and compassionately.

Our deacons assist in areas such as:

- Hospital and home visitation
- Benevolence and mercy ministry

- Member care and encouragement
- Communion preparation
- Baptism assistance
- Practical support during times of crisis or hardship

In short, when needs arise within the church family, deacons are often among the first to respond. Their ministry reflects the servant heart of Christ, who came not to be served but to serve.

Congregational Care Team

The Congregational Care Team serves alongside and under the guidance of the deacons to extend the church's ministry of prayer, encouragement, visitation, hospitality, meals, and practical care.

The Congregational Care Team is not a church office but a ministry team organized to assist the deacons in extending practical care throughout the congregation.

Members of this team help care for those experiencing illness, hospitalization, surgery, childbirth, grief, widowhood, or other significant life events. They assist in ensuring that no member of the church family walks through difficult seasons alone.

This ministry provides a meaningful avenue for women and men with gifts of mercy, encouragement, hospitality, and service to exercise leadership and ministry within the church while supporting the broader work of the deacons.

The Congregational Care Team reflects the biblical call to "bear one another's burdens" and demonstrates the love of Christ in tangible ways.

Congregational Participation and Accountability

Yes, the congregation continues to play an important role in the life and accountability of the church.

While elders provide leadership and oversight, and deacons provide service and care, final earthly responsibility for the church remains with the congregation.

The congregation gathers throughout the year when necessary, as well as twice a year in April and October, to make important decisions regarding the life and direction of the church. These responsibilities are:

- Calling ministerial and pastoral staff
- Electing elders (under the proposed model, elders would be nominated, examined, and presented to the congregation for affirmation in accordance with the Constitution and Bylaws as amended and approved by the congregation.)
- Approving the Ministry Support Plan
- Approving significant financial commitments beyond the Ministry Support Plan
- Approving the purchase or sale of church property
- Approving changes to the Constitution and Bylaws

This model allows the church to benefit from strong leadership while maintaining meaningful congregational accountability.

Conclusion

Whether we serve as elders, deacons, members of the Congregational Care Team, or members of the congregation, we ultimately look not to human authority but to the Chief Shepherd who laid down His life for His sheep.

In the end, our goal is not simply to adopt a new structure, but to align ourselves more faithfully with the pattern we believe God has given His church. Christ rules the church. Elders oversee and shepherd the church. Deacons serve the church. The congregation faithfully participates in the responsibilities entrusted to it. Together, under the authority of God's Word and the lordship of Jesus Christ, we seek to glorify God, build up His people, and proclaim His gospel to the world.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF MARTINSBURG

Understanding Biblical Eldership at First
Baptist Martinsburg

The Role of an Elder

CLASSIFYING YOUR STRENGTH

We see the role of elder being fulfilled in three categories: teacher, shepherd, and administrator. In the Old Testament these positions were prophet, priest, and king. In the New Testament, we see Jesus fulfilling all the roles of spiritual leadership.

It is important to identify the primary area of giftedness for each elder in order for there to be balanced and complementary leadership within the Elder Team.

Teacher

Jesus was the perfect balance of grace and truth, always speaking in love, and always speaking the truth. (This was the O.T. role of the prophet.) The teacher is primarily concerned with truth. Teachers spend hours studying to understand God's Word so that they can confidently preach, teach, and disciple God's people. Teachers keep the Church sound in doctrine.

Shepherd

Jesus cared about people and was filled with compassion for them. He often wept over cities and groups of unbelieving people. Jesus was concerned with the spiritual condition of the people. (This was the O.T. role of the priest.) Shepherds focus on people. A shepherd can be patient with a person's biblical ignorance while ministering to them on an emotional, practical, and physical level.

Administrator

Jesus rules and governs all things. (This is the O.T. role of the king.) Administrators focus on systems and organization. They make things work. They oversee people, resources, and time. A good administrator is constantly building workable and sustainable systems that control many complex moving parts. They help the Church work effectively and efficiently by stewarding resources according to the mission.

TEACHER

Preaching
Teaching
Leadership and
Equipping

SHEPHERD

Counseling
Visitation
Hospitality

ADMINISTRATOR

Stewardship
Oversight
Systems

The Role of an Elder

MAKING DECISIONS

As a team of spiritual leaders, elders make decisions that affect every member of First Baptist Martinsburg. Some decisions are simple and can be made quickly. Others are extremely difficult and become great burdens we carry until consensus can be reached. Whether simple or complex, every decision we make directly affects our future as a church; therefore, every decision is important.

We make all major decisions together. We are all steering this ship. If we steer straight with Jesus as the wind in our sails, then we celebrate together. If we hit the rocks, then we die together trying to save those on board. This is your commitment as an elder. An elder cannot come in and make bad decisions and then bail leaving others to try and salvage what they can. Every decision we make must be backed with integrity of commitment to our calling as an elder.

When we do make poor decisions (and, unfortunately, we will), we must learn from our failures so we do not replicate them in our future decision-making process. Failure is not the end but a tutor that propels us forward, more informed and experienced.

MUTUAL SUBMISSION

Many issues will be raised in elder meetings that everyone simply will not agree with. Mutual submission is key to effective and productive meetings while maintaining Christ-like love and grace for all the brothers.

We will make decisions based on a two-thirds (2/3) majority vote of all elders in attendance (with significant decisions requiring every elder to vote). When an issue is up for discussion, we communicate openly and honestly. When the vote is taken and the decision is made based on the consensus of the group, that decision is carried out by all the elders (even those who disagreed with the motion). There are no winners or losers, only decisions made that we hope glorify Jesus despite what we think personally of them.

Some decisions are to be tabled and given more time for consideration through prayer and counseling.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS

1. Elders and pastors

Elder and pastor are both synonyms describing the same office in scripture. Some believe that elders are appointed to make decisions yet never lift a finger. This is an erroneous view. Elders are appointed to bring accountability and much needed help to lead the Church. Elders don't make decisions and then expect the staff pastors to go and implement them. The elders are active in implementation; not only leading through spiritual decisions, but also engaging in active service alongside our staff pastors and directors.

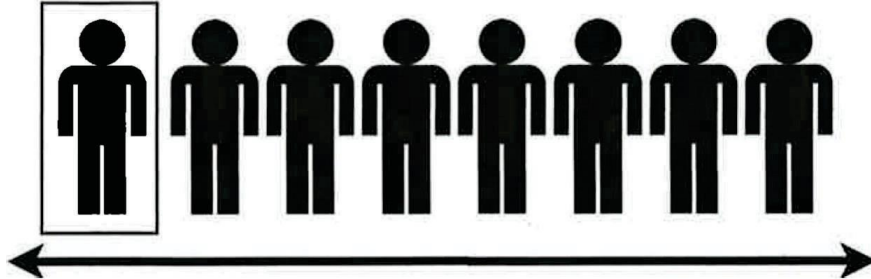
2. Elders should sit on stage and be constantly honored at all opportunities

Elders lead like Jesus, through humble servanthood. We set the example by not seeking to honor ourselves, but instead work hard to show our dedication to Jesus as an example to the Church. There is no room for pride in leading the Lord's Church. There are appropriate times the Church will show appreciation for an individual elder or elder team. This is an opportunity to receive the compliment or recognition with humility, always ultimately pointing people to the Lord.

Relationship to Lead Pastor

FIRST AMONG EQUALS

In order to avoid confusion, we need to discuss the role of the lead pastor as he relates to other elders. This graph will help visually explain.



ELDERS

As you can see, all elders exist and function on a level plane of equality. While some may offer more talent and skill than others, they are all equal in their roles. This includes the lead pastor who is one among equals. Like King Arthur and his knights, no one sits at the head of the table. Instead, they sit at a round table looking directly into each other's faces showing equality among them. Yet, despite this equality, Arthur has the responsibility of directing the conversation and vision of the group. Every team needs a leader, and it is the responsibility of the lead pastor to LEAD. Scripture echoes this concept in a number of situations: James is the lead pastor in Jerusalem, Timothy in Ephesus, and Titus in Crete. This role is most clearly seen in scripture through the life of the Apostle Peter.

Peter's name appears first in every list of apostles in the N.T. (Acts 1:13; Mt 10:2; Lk 6:13; Mk 3:14)

Described as first (Mt 10:2)

First disciple called by Jesus (Mk 1:16-18) Peter is First identified apostle (Mk 3:14, 16) Jesus clearly speaks to Peter over James and John (Lk 5:7,10)

Recognized leader of the apostles (Mk 1:26; Lk 22:32; Acts 1:15)

First apostle to witness the resurrection (Lk 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5)

First apostle to recognize Jesus as the Messiah (Mt 16: 13-17)

First to preach the gospel Acts 2:14; 3:12)

Continual spokesman for the apostles (Acts 15:7)

First to visit the gentiles (Acts 10)

Most dominant figure in the Gospels and Acts (189 appearances, John second with 50, James with 18)

Relationship to Lead Pastor

LIMITATIONS OF THE LEAD PASTOR

Before we go further, we must understand the necessity for elders to be in a relationship with a lead pastor. Again, we go to the life of Peter:

- Refers to himself as a ‘fellow elder’ (1Peter 5:1)
- Makes a hypocritical mistake that deserves a rebuke by a fellow elder (Gal 2:11-14)
- Has seriously bad ideas that glorify Satan instead of Jesus (Mt 16:21-23)
- Denies Jesus (Mt 26:69-77)
- Proudly refuses Jesus’ cleansing him (Jn 16:8)
- Sleeps through prayer time (Mt 26:43)
- Gets ahead of Jesus (Jn 18:10)
- Distracted by supernatural occurrences (Mt 17:1-5)
- Takes his eyes off Jesus and begins to sink (Mt 14:30)
- Quits ministry and returned to fishing (Jn 21:3)

As you can see, Peter makes mistakes on several occasions. This is why he and all lead pastors need the fellowship, wisdom, and accountability of men who love Jesus and His Church. Lead pastors can have blind spots and bad ideas. They are prone to sin. It’s the Elder Team’s responsibility to cover the blind spots, fill the holes, and protect the Church from sin and error and to lead First Baptist Martinsburg in a way that honors Jesus.

While the first among equals may reserve the right to set the agenda and lead with vision, the lead pastor should not make decisions concerning the well-being of the Church by himself. This is why elders were appointed in every church in the New Testament (Titus 1:5). Several men make better decisions than one man. There is accountability in numbers. Also, there is protection from disgruntled people when elders make every decision corporately instead of individually. Motives are purified when our decisions are made in front of the eyes of others. The elders of First Baptist Martinsburg make decisions together and all elders submit to the decisions of the group (even the lead pastor) whether they like them or not.

Each elder has an equal responsibility in determining the direction of First Baptist Martinsburg and the ministry impact we have on this city. This should encourage diligence in addressing every issue so that the elders steward well their individual and collective responsibility of leadership.

First Baptist Martinsburg Ethos

ETHOS DEFINED

Merrimack-Webster defines ETHOS as the distinguishing character, sentiment, moral nature, or guiding beliefs of a person, group, or institution. Simply put, it's the culture we are building and protecting at First Baptist Martinsburg.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

At First Baptist Martinsburg, our vision is to create a community of authentic believers and to witness to a city transformed by the life-changing reality of the Gospel, as people come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior. Our goal is to reach through relationships. We accomplish our mission TOGETHER. This is our culture, the prevailing attitude that undergirds our thoughts and actions. TOGETHER. We must be diligent to continue to build and protect a God-honoring culture TOGETHER.

OUR CORE VALUE: TOGETHER

We strive to be Together. **Together We:**

TREASURE CHRIST - God's People Must Spread the Passion for the Supremacy of God in Everything for the Joy of Everyone Through Jesus Christ

ARE TRANSFORMED – Changed People Act Differently.

PRAY – A Praying Church is a Healthy Church.

GROW - Saved People Develop in God's Grace.

SHARE THE GOSPEL - Saved People Tell Others About Jesus

SERVE – Saved People Put Others First.

GIVE - Saved People are Generous People.

ARE UNITED – Saved people are One in Christ.

TREASURE PEOPLE - Saved People Come Together in Community.

INVEST IN NEXT GENERATIONS - Children should Thrive in a Healthy Church.

SPECIAL INTERESTS

We all have our “soap-box” issues – the hot buttons that we feel most passionate about. As an elder at First Baptist Martinsburg, you can never use your office to push your agenda. All our decisions must be in the best interests of the entire Church and not just a special interest group within the Church that you feel you need to represent.

Thinking Theologically

THEOLOGICAL UNITY

As a church we have quite a diversity of people coming to us from a plethora of different faith backgrounds. Among the diversity, we cannot focus on the many things that could possibly divide us. Instead, we focus primarily on what unites us. This allows people of all walks of life to gather, heed God's Word preached, worship, and grow in their faith. However, as people grow into membership and higher leadership positions, the need for stronger theological unity becomes much more apparent. Elders at First Baptist Martinsburg must all agree and be able to defend several major theological positions. We call these our closed-hand positions: meaning, they are not up for debate. In this way, you will be able to teach Scripture and disciple people with confidence and soundness. We cannot have elders teaching inconsistent doctrine to the people God has entrusted to us.

THE CLOSED HAND

We base our close-handed positions on historic, orthodox, Christian teaching. We affirm the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 and our church's statement of faith. Each elder of our church must be in agreement with these documents and the theological positions contained therein.

THE OPEN HAND

Some things in the Bible are black and white. Some things are not. We choose to put the gray areas into our "open hand." This way we can be a unified church in Jesus all moving forward in the main mission and still allow individual believers to hold to their personal convictions concerning speculative ideologies. You may have strong opinions about some of these issues, and it's okay, as long as you don't try to make your strong opinions a litmus test for true Christianity. A few examples include the following:

- Eschatology
- Creation views
- Ministry methods

Sadly, many churches make the above issues imperative and draw lines in the sand that the scriptures simply don't draw. They cause division where division shouldn't be. It has been said that all Christian churches in America believe 90% of the same thing. Yet, they choose to focus and divide over the 10% that the Bible is unclear about. At First Baptist Martinsburg, we rally around and fight for the 90% and let individuals figure out the 10% as best they can as they love and follow Jesus.

An Elder's Family

MINISTRY AND THE FAMILY

The responsibility of ministry and serving people with endless needs can take a toll on an elder and on his marriage and family life. God hasn't called elders to separate their personal life from their ministry (professional) life WITH God's people as a shepherd. The constant need can create a constant demand on an elder and, over time, both weigh him down physically and spiritually as well as pull him away from his primary call as a Christian, husband, and father.

According to 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6, elders are to be a one-woman man, the husband of one wife. There must be no other woman in his life to whom he relates emotionally or physically. He will manage his own household well, having respectful and obedient children, dealing with his children with all dignity. It is vital that elders practice healthy life rhythms, caring for their own physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being and tending to the same in their marriage and family.

An Elder's Morality

Also according to 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1, there are several moral qualifications for elders. Paul provides qualities to both model and avoid. An elder is to be above reproach. They are not expected to be perfect but to strive to grow in Godliness. Above reproach can also refer to no glaring moral weakness. They are to be sober-minded, able to think clearly and spiritually about important things. Elders must be self-controlled to have balanced judgement and able to make rational, cool-headed decisions. An elder should be respectable, well balanced and virtuous in character. He must be hospitable, having an open life that includes community with others. He must be gentle and willing to help others and seek their good. He must live according to God's word, having Scripture as the basis for the truth his household lives upon. He must be holy, devoted to the Scripture. He must be dedicated to glorifying the name of God regardless of what others may think. An elder must be disciplined. Shepherding God's people is not easy. Discipline is needed to fulfill ministry faithfully and effectively.

An elder is not to be a drunkard, addicted to substances such as wine, beer, or other strong drink. Paul does not say it is wrong to drink alcohol, rather he is referring to the negative effects of the excesses of drinking too much and too often. Elders should not abuse any substance that would bring shame on the person and reproach on the church. He should not be violent, easily irritated or have a bad temper. Elders must calmly and rationally deal with heated arguments and tense situations that often find their way into the church. He likewise should not be quarrelsome, but instead be gentle and peaceful. Elders must be able to deal with tensions without adding to them. He must be a peacemaker and find a way to bring about reconciliation.

He should not be a lover of money, greedy. The result of this is detrimental to a person's soul, according to the New Testament (1 Tim. 6:9-10; Mark 10:25). He should not be arrogant or prideful. He should not be quick-tempered. An elder must be able to deal with difficult and emotionally charged situations that arise in one's personal life and in the context of the church.

WHAT AUTHORITY DO ELDERS ACTUALLY HAVE?

The New Testament teaches that elders are entrusted with the spiritual oversight of the local church. Their authority is not derived from personal status, personality, business experience, or popularity, but from Christ, who is the Chief Shepherd of the church. Elders are called to exercise their leadership in submission to God's Word and for the good of God's people.

Scripture assigns elders the responsibility of shepherding the flock (1 Peter 5:1-4), overseeing the ministry of the church (Acts 20:28), teaching sound doctrine (Titus 1:9), protecting the church from false teaching (Acts 20:29-31), equipping believers for ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12), praying for and caring for the congregation (James 5:14), and providing godly leadership (Hebrews 13:17).

Biblical authority is not domination or control. Elders are specifically commanded not to "lord it over" those entrusted to their care, but to serve as examples to the flock (1 Peter 5:3). Their leadership should be marked by humility, love, wisdom, patience, and a willingness to sacrifice for the good of others.

At First Baptist Martinsburg, we believe elders are called to lead, shepherd, teach, protect, and guide the church under the authority of Jesus Christ and in accordance with the Scriptures. They are not called to rule as kings, but to serve as shepherds. As they faithfully fulfill their calling, they help the church remain healthy, united, doctrinally sound, and focused on its mission of making disciples.

Elder Policies

TERM OF AN ELDER

Scripture gives no specific length of time that an elder serves. At First Baptist Martinsburg elders may continue serving so long as they remain biblically qualified, spiritually fruitful, and able to faithfully fulfill the responsibilities of the office. Each year we will conduct an elder review and give elders an opportunity to recommit for another year of service or step aside for a season of sabbath rest. If an elder is no longer effectively fulfilling the responsibilities of shepherding, oversight, teaching, or leadership, he may be encouraged to step aside for a season or conclude his service as an elder.

EXPECTATIONS

An elder should plan on spending an average of 5 to 10 hours per week on church-related business. They are expected to attend church regularly, serve where needed, give generously, attend a monthly elders meeting (sometimes two depending on seasonal demand), and teach membership classes. Also, Sunday morning pulpit ministry might occasionally be needed. Additionally, an elder retreat occurs one weekend a year.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND DISCIPLINE

If an elder struggles with sin that becomes habitual or has given himself to doctrine that is not sound according to our closed hand, then the following actions will be taken:

If the elder is repentant and submissive,

1. the elders will pray earnestly for the brother.
2. the elders will decide on a path of restoration for the brother. This may or may not include the fallen elder stepping down for a season while he works through his sin.

If the elder is unrepentant (the elders will decide between repentance and defiance),

1. he will be brought on trial before the elders.
2. upon guilty verdict, he will be removed from eldership.
3. depending on seriousness, the guilty may be expunged from the Church.
4. In cases involving public disqualification, removal from office, or matters affecting the church body, the congregation shall be informed in an appropriate manner consistent with biblical principles of discipline and restoration.

If an elder's sin is private, then the restoration or trial actions will be a private matter. If an elder's sin is public, then the church will have to deal publicly with him. No elder is exempt from accountability and discipline – not even the lead elder. In trial, verdicts will be established based on majority vote of the elders (with the exception of the elder on trial).

Elder Policies

ELDER ORDINATION PROCESS

- Demonstrate evidence of God's calling to serve as an elder (from personal perspective and affirmation/observation of others)
- Current Elder Team will assemble an ordination council to
 - * Conduct an elder candidate interview and questioning
 - * Make a written recommendation to our church membership for ordination of the candidate
- Present the elder candidate to the congregation for affirmation prior to ordination and installation as an elder.
- The church holds a public ordination service for the candidate.
- The newly ordained elder begins serving on the Elder Team.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF MARTINSBURG

Understanding the Ministry of Deacons at First
Baptist Martinsburg

Introduction

Throughout the history of First Baptist Martinsburg, deacons have played an important role in serving and leading our church. We are grateful for the many faithful who have invested their time, wisdom, and energy in helping care for God's people and advance the ministry of our church.

As we continue studying the Scriptures and seeking to align our church more closely with the patterns of leadership and service found in the New Testament, we believe it is helpful to clearly define the unique role of deacons within the life of the church.

This document is intended to explain how we understand the biblical ministry of deacons and how that ministry functions alongside elder oversight, congregational participation, and the mission of First Baptist Martinsburg.

The Role of a Deacon

WHAT DEACONS DO

This section provides an overview of how our deacons serve the church family of First Baptist Martinsburg.

The two primary roles of deacons at First Baptist Martinsburg are CARE and SERVICE.

CARE focuses on ministering directly to people through encouragement, visitation, prayer, benevolence, and support during times of hardship.

SERVICE focuses on meeting practical needs within the church family and helping facilitate ministry so that the church can flourish in its mission.

The ministry of deacons reflects the pattern established in Acts 6, where spiritually mature servants were appointed to care for practical needs within the church. By meeting these needs faithfully, deacons help strengthen the unity of the church and support the ministry of the elders.

CARE

- Hospital visitation
- Home visitation
- Prayer ministry
- Widow care
- Shut-in ministry
- Recovery support
- Grief care
- Encouragement ministry
- Crisis response
- Congregational care

SERVICE

- Benevolence ministry
- Meal coordination
- Baptism assistance
- Communion preparation
- Funeral support
- Practical assistance for members
- Service projects
- Volunteer mobilization
- Ministry support
- Congregational Care Team coordination

CLASSIFYING YOUR STRENGTH

Every deacon serves the church through practical ministry and compassionate care. However, God often equips individuals with particular strengths that allow them to serve more effectively in certain areas.

Identifying your primary strengths helps create a balanced and complementary deacon team.

CAREGIVER

Caregivers focus primarily on people.

They are compassionate, relational, and encouraging. They naturally gravitate toward visitation, prayer, listening, and helping others through difficult seasons of life.

Examples include:

- Hospital visitation

- Home visitation
- Prayer ministry
- Grief support
- Widow care
- Encouragement ministry

SERVANT

Servants focus primarily on meeting practical needs. They enjoy solving problems, helping people, and responding quickly when needs arise.

Examples include:

- Benevolence ministry
- Service projects
- Crisis response
- Physical assistance
- Member support
- Community service opportunities

COORDINATOR

Coordinators focus primarily on connecting people and resources. They are gifted organizers who help ensure that care and service ministries operate effectively and efficiently.

Examples include:

- Volunteer coordination
- Meal ministry organization
- Congregational Care Team leadership
- Communication and follow-up
- Scheduling and ministry planning
- Resource management

CAREGIVER	SERVANT	COORDINATOR
People	Needs	Ministry

THE MINISTRY OF MERCY

Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly demonstrates His concern for the poor, the vulnerable, the widow, the orphan, the sick, and the hurting.

Deacons have a unique opportunity to help the church reflect God's compassion through practical acts of mercy and service.

Mercy ministry includes:

- Caring for widows and shut-ins
- Responding to financial hardship
- Assisting families during medical crises
- Supporting grieving families
- Helping members through unexpected emergencies
- Connecting people with available resources

Mercy ministry requires both compassion and wisdom.

Deacons should be quick to listen, slow to judge, eager to help, and careful stewards of the resources entrusted to them. Every act of mercy should seek not only to meet immediate needs but also to encourage spiritual growth, personal responsibility, and deeper connection to the church family.

The goal is not simply to solve problems but to demonstrate the love of Christ in tangible ways.

As servants of Christ, deacons help ensure that no member of the church family suffers alone.

HOW DEACONS ARE SELECTED

The pattern established in Acts 6 demonstrates both congregational participation and leadership oversight in the selection of servants for the church. The apostles identified the need, established the qualifications, and instructed the congregation to identify qualified men from among themselves. The apostles then approved and appointed those who were selected.

Following this biblical pattern, members of First Baptist Martinsburg may nominate individuals whom they believe demonstrate the biblical qualifications and servant-hearted character necessary for deacon ministry. The current deacon team may likewise recommend potential candidates. Elders may also nominate potential deacons.

The elders and deacons will jointly review and evaluate all nominations, considering each candidate's character, spiritual maturity, reputation, and demonstrated faithfulness in service.

Following prayerful consideration, qualified candidates will be recommended to the congregation.

The congregation will then be given the opportunity to affirm those candidates for

service as deacons. Upon congregational affirmation, the candidates will be formally appointed and begin serving in the ministry of deacon.

This process seeks to preserve both the congregation's responsibility to recognize faithful servants among its members and the responsibility of church leadership to ensure that those recommended meet the biblical qualifications for the office.