



# **CHURCH LEADERSHIP**

AN INTRODUCTION ON LEADERSHIP AT GATEWAY CHURCH



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## Introduction

I remember the day. It was early January in 2023. I was meeting with some pastors in Orlando when our Executive Director sent me an article that included a list of stressors for pastors. She asked, “Which stressors on this list would you say you relate to the most? And is there anything else you would add?” She had copied one of our elders in her email to me, so I couldn’t ignore her. I spent a couple days reflecting on her questions before I sent my reply.

I wrote, “I don’t know that I’m good at being the vision guy for Gateway Church. Things like ‘Should we start another campus?’ or ‘Should we think about starting Saturday night services again?’ are decisions I never know what to do with, when to bring them up, or how we’d even know if we have answers. I’ve never understood how pastors come up with a 3-5 year vision plan. It all seems like throwing spaghetti against the wall to me.”

This email thread sent me and the elders on a ten month journey. Through many conversations, meetings, prayer, and reflection, a vision started to become clear. I wrote down some ideas, discussed them with the elders, presented them to the staff and some volunteers, and eventually did an entire preaching series on all of this.

This graphic depicts what had become clear to me:



These four columns represent the key components that drive the life, ministry, and direction of a local church. The first component is the pastor. The second component of a church is its key leaders. The third component of a church is its discipleship process. And the fourth component is the disciple — all of us who are followers of Jesus here at Gateway Church.

So component one — the pastor. This is me, Pastor Josh, for better or worse. The Bible has a lot to say about the qualifications, characteristics, and calling of a pastor. You can learn more about those in the first booklet of this series - *The Pastor*.

The second component of a church, and the focus of this booklet, is the other key leaders. Here at Gateway

Church our key leaders include our elders, our deacons, our staff, and those who serve as Life Group leaders.

These key leaders help the pastor move the church along in a certain direction, which leads to the third component of a church: our discipleship process. Here at Gateway Church this is our process of Worship, Connect, Serve, and Go. This is how we help you grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ. To learn more about our discipleship process, pick up a copy of the third booklet in this series – *How Do I Grow?*

Finally, the fourth component of the church are the disciples who make up the church. What we do to grow in our faith – our discipleship process – is vitally important, but our doing must always lead us toward who we are to become as disciples of Jesus Christ. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is the goal and everything else, our discipleship process, our key leaders, and our pastor are all leading us toward this goal.

Our vision for every follower of Jesus here at Gateway Church is that we'd be disciples...

1. Who are Word and Spirit Christians.
2. Who are generous.
3. Who are family.
4. Who are disciples who make disciples.
5. And who are Kingdom-minded.

The fourth booklet in this series, *Disciples of Jesus*, goes into detail about each of these characteristics of a disciple.

These four booklets, together, will help you better understand our vision for the kind of church we are striving to be here at Gateway Church.

## **Church Leadership**

Church leadership can often be a confusing (and divisive) part of the local church. For example, what exactly do elders do? Some people view the elders like a board of directors. The people who “keep the pastor in check.” Some view the elders as representatives of the people in the congregation, similar to how we elect government officials to represent us. Many want to avoid ever being asked to serve as an elder, because they have heard about long meetings discussing how much a new air conditioning unit is going to cost the church.

What about deacons? What do they do? Or, better yet, what does the word deacon even mean?

Then we have less specific, but potentially more divisive, questions. Should anyone be allowed to be in leadership? What about women serving as elders or deacons? Or church staff, for that matter. Do you have to reach a certain age to be an elder or deacon? Lots of questions. Lots of opinions.

But our goal is always to see what the Bible has to say on a topic. That is what this booklet is about. We will begin with the Bible and return to it again and again as we look at

the topic of church leadership. There is just one important question to consider before we go any further...

## **Who is responsible for doing ministry at Gateway Church?**

At first glance, this may seem like an easy question...it's the senior pastor, right? Or is it the staff? Maybe it's the elders...or deacons? Throughout this booklet we're going to see that ministry isn't simply the work of the senior pastor, nor is it just the responsibility of the staff or the elders or the deacons. We'll see that ministry is the responsibility of all who profess faith in Jesus Christ. Because to be a Christian is to be in ministry — and this means that ministry requires teamwork.

We will come back to this idea of the church as a team, but first, let's dive a little deeper into two specific, often misunderstood, groups of leaders within the church - elders and deacons.

## Chapter 1

# Begin with the Bible

In *The Sound of Music*, Julie Andrews teaches the Von Trapp children to sing by saying, “Let’s start at the very beginning / A very good place to start / When you read you begin with A - B - C / When you sing you begin with Do - Re - Mi.”

Likewise, the best place to start in order to better understand church leadership is the Bible — so that is where we will begin.

### Four Passages

Though there are many biblical passages that speak on church leadership, there are four common passages that must be looked at in order to understand this topic. They are: 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Titus 1:5-9, Ephesians 4:11-16, and 1 Peter 5:1-5. Let’s look at each of these in more detail.

#### 1 Timothy 3:

*The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent*

*but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil. Deacons likewise 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. Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. 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.*

Here we find the qualifications and characteristics required of elders and deacons. There's much more here than a short booklet can cover, but the following are a few things worth noting.

First, church leadership begins with a call from God. This is what Paul means when he says, "if anyone aspires."

Thus, we should be cautious to think that church leadership begins with a nominating process. It begins by an internal call by God on an individual to serve in leadership.

Second, other than the requirement for elders to “be able to teach,” the rest of the characteristics are quite unremarkable. In fact, they are qualities we should hope to see in any follower of Jesus. Thus, the internal call to serve in leadership and for elders, the ability to teach, are the two qualities that stick out from the rest.

Third, the mention of being the “husband of one wife” doesn’t exclude singles from serving in church leadership. It simply means if you are married, you are faithful to your spouse. Sometimes this qualification trips folks up.

Finally, a quick note about “being able to teach.” This doesn’t necessarily mean that every elder has to be able to preach. In fact, Paul later says in the same letter to Timothy, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” So all elders are to be able to teach, but some elders “labor in preaching and teaching.” The distinction is that some elders are paid to preach and teach the Bible. They have most likely had more education in how to preach and teach. Thus, their primary role is as the preacher and teacher of the church. However, all elders are to be able to explain what the Bible means to others in a way that is faithful to Scripture. Opportunities to teach, in this way, include anything and everything from leading a small group, to counseling a couple or individual, to leading a Bible study, to teaching children in the church.

Titus 1:

*This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you — if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He 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.*

In this letter of Paul's to another pastor leading a church, there isn't anything new that wasn't found in the letter to Timothy. There is a bit more clarity, though, on the expectation that elders be able to teach. The teaching includes "giving instruction in sound doctrine" and also being able "to rebuke those who contradict it." This means that all elders should know basic sound theology and be able to recognize contradictions to that sound theology.

Ephesians 4:

*And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the*

*faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

Here we have another letter written by Paul. This time he is writing to the church in Ephesus which, by the way, is the church that Timothy is pastoring when he receives his letter from Paul. Here he gives an insight into what elders (shepherds/pastors) do.

First, elders equip the saints for the work of ministry. It can be easy to view pastors (and church staff) as the people paid to do the ministry of the church. “Not so,” says Paul. He says that a pastor's role is to train and equip the congregation to do the work of ministry. This is done primarily through preaching, but is also accomplished through other teaching opportunities.

Second, part of the “equipping of the saints” includes leading the congregation towards “unity of the faith and knowledge of the Son of God.” This would include teaching about doctrine — the truths we believe.

Third, this “equipping of the saints” through preaching and teaching is to continue until the congregation measures up to the “stature of the fullness of Christ.” Paul then goes on to describe what that looks like in verses 14-16. This is Paul’s way of saying that the goal in preaching and teaching is for the congregation to continue growing until they reflect Christ perfectly, which will not happen in this life. So pastors are to keep preaching and teaching until Jesus returns.

1 Peter 5:

*So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

Finally, someone other than Paul gets to chime in on our discussion! First, notice that though we tend to speak of Peter as an apostle and disciple, here he refers to himself as a

“fellow elder.” So Peter viewed himself as a pastor as well. I bet this idea was birthed out of his conversation with Jesus where Jesus tells Peter to, “Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.”

Thus, Peter’s words to other pastors begins with, “shepherd the flock of God that is among you.” For that is what a pastor does. He cares for God’s sheep. Peter tells pastors how to shepherd. Shepherds are to be gentle “and” are to be willing. They are not to be volunteering for church leadership for selfish gain.

Peter also gives his fellow elders a reminder of the reward that is theirs for being faithful shepherds. Though Paul tells us that it is right for a pastor to be paid for their work, Peter reminds pastors that their ultimate reward isn’t earthly, but is heavenly — “a crown of unfading glory.” Some have used this to justify under-paying their pastors and church staff, which is a shame, as no Christian, not just church staff, is to set their eyes on worldly rewards. All followers of Jesus are to be “storing up a treasure in Heaven” and not here on earth.

Finally, Peter gives counsel to people in the congregation. He tells them to “be subject to the elders” and to be humble. Similarly, the author of Hebrews writes, “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.” And later states, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy

and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

## **Final Thoughts**

Being a church leader begins with being called by God. An inward call accompanied by an outward confirmation by others. No one has the right or authority to declare themselves to be a church leader. Finally, as Christians, the Bible is to be our final authority on all subjects, especially church leadership. Now that we have seen some of what the Bible has to say about church leaders, let's look more closely at elders and deacons to figure out the difference between the two roles.

## Chapter 2

### **Elders and Deacons: What's the Difference?**

Are you ready for one of the more shocking statements in the Bible? (How's that for grabbing your attention?) One of the more shocking statements in the Bible is made by Peter, and it's made in reference to church leadership.

*Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. 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. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word." And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of*

*Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith.*  
*(Acts 6:1-7 ESV)*

### **Pastors Don't Wait Tables**

How dare Peter? Obviously, he must be a terrible pastor, because he doesn't even have time to care for the widows in the church! Time to call a church meeting and find a pastor who cares, because Peter obviously doesn't know what it means to be a pastor.

Or...maybe he does, and we're the ones who are confused about what it means to be a pastor.

Here's the situation. We're in Jerusalem. The church has experienced rapid growth. From 120 believers at the beginning of the Book of Acts, to 3,000 believing after Peter's sermon in Acts chapter 2, to 5,000 men believing in Acts chapter 4, and the number has only been increasing since.

And not only has the size of the church increased, (and remember, this is just the church in Jerusalem that we're talking about), but the diversity of the church has been increasing as well. From Jews who had been following Jesus, to Jews in Jerusalem (many of whom were just visiting the city), to now Jews coming from all different kinds of cultural backgrounds. And with growth in numbers and growth in

diversity comes division. Thus, the dilemma that Luke records in Acts chapter 6.

Widows coming from a Greek cultural background are being neglected in the daily distribution of provisions for the needy among them. To be clear, this was an injustice. We're not sure what form of prejudice was the primary culprit — “We don't like you Greek speaking folks,” or “We take care of our own” — but regardless, widows in the church were not being taken care of. Division was creeping into the church. And, thankfully, someone brings this to the attention of church leadership.

Let me repeat that last sentence. Thankfully, someone brings this to the attention of church leadership. Please don't ever assume that church leadership knows something. It's always best to make sure they know something, especially something that is causing division in the church.

Peter, and the other church leaders, hear the complaint and make a leadership decision. “It wouldn't be right for us to abandon our responsibilities for preaching and teaching the Word of God to help with the care of the poor.” Notice two things.

First, Peter is very clear in what his role is as an elder in the church. His primary responsibility is to preach and teach the Word of God. Sometimes this is forgotten in the modern church. We either undervalue the pastor's responsibility of preaching and teaching the Word of God or we expect him to have other responsibilities that distract him from what is most important. Like, for example, taking care

of widows in the church. So Peter is clear on what his responsibilities are.

But secondly, Peter doesn't think it's OK for the widows to be neglected. We find this as we continue reading the verses. "So, friends, choose seven men from among you whom everyone trusts, men full of the Holy Spirit and good sense, and we'll assign them this task. Meanwhile, we'll stick to our assigned tasks of prayer and speaking God's Word." In order for the widows to be taken care of, without Peter and the other elders neglecting their primary responsibility, others in the church would need to step up and lead.

And look at what happens. "The congregation thought this was a great idea," and "the Word of God prospered. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased dramatically." When the elders were able to focus on their primary responsibilities and allow others to step into leadership to care for the needs of the widows, "the Word of God prospered." The Gospel spread. More people came to faith. And everyone in the church thought this was a great idea.

### **Leading with Words**

So back to our question: What's the difference between elders and deacons? Elders lead the church through the ministry of the Word and prayer. This means that elders mainly do Word ministry. Thus, the pastor of the church should spend the majority of his time focused on his primary responsibilities of preaching, teaching, and prayer. This includes lots of study time, as a congregation should desire for their pastor to be preaching sermons that are faithful and

accurate. This includes much time spent reading and memorizing the Bible. This includes much time in prayer, which may sound like something that a pastor can do at any time. This is true, but prayer, if we want it to be a pastor's primary responsibility, should be something that he is intentional about prioritizing.

### **Leading with Hands**

What about deacons? Deacons lead with their hands, freeing up the elders to focus on their primary responsibility of preaching, teaching, and prayer. In fact, the word deacon comes from a Greek word that is found 29 times in the New Testament. Our English Bibles translate the word as servant, attendant, minister, and deacon. In Philippians, Paul addresses the Christians in the church in addition to the overseers (another word for elder) and the deacons. In Acts 6, though the word deacon does not appear, when Peter says, *"It is not right that we should give up preaching the Word of God to serve tables,"* the root of the Greek word translated as serve is diakonos. Similarly, the Greek word translated as deacon is diakonos. You don't have to know Greek to see that the words serve and deacon come from the same root word.

So in the early church the deacons served the church with their hands, ensuring that the elders were freed up to serve the church through the ministry of the Word and prayer. Both of these leadership ministries are vital and necessary for a healthy, growing church.

## Chapter 3

# Two Specific Questions

Now that we have some understanding about the differences between elders and deacons, we come to two particular questions that are sometimes asked at our church. In Chapter 7, I will address one of these questions a bit more thoroughly as it is a common question among Christians in general, but this chapter is focused primarily on two things specific to Gateway Church.

### Women

Depending on your church background (or lack of it), you may have noticed that churches don't seem to agree on what leadership roles women can hold in a local church. Some churches have women pastors, elders, and deacons. Others don't allow women to serve in any of these roles. And some churches find a sort of middle ground.

Before I get to what we do at Gateway Church, I want to remind us where we're always to begin, as this is especially important when we talk about a potentially divisive topic like this one. We begin with the Bible. Not with our culture. Not with a political philosophy. We must begin and end with God's Word.

Now having said that, Christians who are trying to be faithful to Scripture have landed in various positions when it comes to women in leadership in the local church. I will address some of those differences, briefly, in chapter 6. But for now, here are our biblical reasons for why we land where we do when it comes to what roles women can have in leadership at Gateway Church.

Let's begin with the leadership position of deacon. Here at Gateway Church, we believe that both men and women can serve as deacons. Here's our biblical justification: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well." This is an example of something mentioned in the previous chapter. Phoebe, a woman, is identified as a servant (root — diakonos).

There are much more in-depth, longer, more technical arguments than what I'm about to give you, but it seems obvious that Paul recognizes Phoebe in a very specific way. Unlike all of the other folks that he mentions in the chapter, he calls Phoebe out as a key servant in the church. And the Bible refers to these key servants as deacons. In fact, the New Living Translation seems to agree as it translates verse 1 as "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deacon in the church in Cenchrea."

So, in our church, both men and women can serve as deacons. But what about being elders or pastors? Here at Gateway Church we believe that the church leadership

position of elder or pastor is for men only, and here are our biblical reasons why.

Warning: This isn't a popular Bible passage to our modern ears. "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet." This verse is found in the same letter of Paul's where we found all of the qualities and characteristics for elders and deacons. What I want to point out in this verse is how both "teaching" and "exercising authority" are found together in this verse. Given what we've already learned about the responsibilities of the elder, this appears to be the kind of church leadership position that Paul is referring to in this verse.

Additionally, unlike Phoebe, nowhere do we find a woman being referred to as an elder in the New Testament. Though we do see a woman help teach a man whose theology needed some correcting, she did so with her husband. And it is not clear that the husband and wife were teaching the man in an official church leadership role or simply helping a fellow Christian understand things better.

Finally, Jesus. Jesus was very radical when it came to the cultural expectations of his day. For example, he hung out with tax collectors and allowed prostitutes to wash his feet. If anyone was going to make a statement that countered the cultural expectations of his day concerning women in church leadership, Jesus would be the person to do it. And guess who he chose as his disciples? He chose 12 men to lead the church.

One of these men was a tax collector. Choosing a tax collector as a leader in the church would have been as radical as choosing a woman. Yet Jesus chose one and didn't choose the other. So if someone wants to argue in favor of women being pastors and elders in the church, you have to first answer the question of why Jesus didn't choose a woman to be one of his 12 disciples.

Some may wonder, "But what about the women in the Old Testament — like Deborah and Esther — who obviously led the people of Israel?" This booklet is about CHURCH leadership, not leadership in general. Neither Deborah nor Esther were church elders. One was a judge and the other a queen. And we must be careful to not confuse leadership, even leadership in the Bible, with church leadership. For example, if Esther being a queen gives justification for women to be elders, then should we conclude that pastors today should consider themselves to be kings of their church? Probably not.

## **Staff**

Having tackled the topic of women in church leadership, let's move on to a (hopefully) less divisive subject: church staff. Can church staff serve as elders and deacons? Yes! Why? Because we have no biblical warrant to disqualify someone from being an elder or deacon simply because they're paid by the church. As said in an earlier chapter, Paul expects some elders to be paid by the church, and we have no reason to limit this solely to the pastor.

Additionally, our denomination doesn't have any limitations when it comes to the matter of staff serving as elders and deacons. This sometimes surprises folks who think otherwise or who get nervous when they hear that staff are being asked to be elders and deacons.

Regardless, if we remember the responsibilities of elders and deacons, it seems that every staff member is fulfilling one of these two roles anyway. Either they are leading the ministries they oversee through preaching, teaching, and prayer or they are assisting staff who do lead in such ways. For example, the staff who work in our operations department (finances, building maintenance, etc...) serve in a way like that of a deacon, regardless if they have been given the recognition of being a deacon in our church.

To be sure, we would never want to have only staff as elders and deacons, but we should not limit what responsibilities someone can have in the church simply because they are on the church payroll.

## Chapter 4

### Our Process

In the next chapter, I will describe what typical elder and deacon meetings are like. For now, I want to give you an understanding of what our process is like in training and affirming potential church leaders.

#### Training

For the past few years, every potential elder and deacon at Gateway Church has been trained prior to taking on their leadership role. This training has evolved over the years, ranging from a six month elder study with Pastor Josh to a short term class that we use for both elders and deacons. The point is that all leaders are first trained on what it means to be an elder or deacon at Gateway Church.

This training continues once a person starts serving in their respective role. Elders, who are collectively called the Session, are always studying and growing in our understanding of what it means to shepherd church members more faithfully. You can find many of the books that we have studied together in Chapter 7. Likewise, deacons frequently read books together in order to further

develop their theology of serving, or participate in hands-on training to improve their processes.

## **Affirming**

Part of the affirming of an individual's call to serve as a church leader is a hard look at their participation in the life of Gateway Church. This includes their, and their family's, if applicable, worship attendance, Life Group participation, where they serve, how they go, and also their giving. We look at all of these areas more closely because, in a large church like ours, it's easy for folks to hide areas where they are disengaged, and it's also difficult for us to "just know" what someone is doing.

The fact we look at their giving may disturb you a bit. First, know that we don't have a dollar amount someone must give in order to be an elder or deacon (like \$1,000). Second, our requirement is that anyone being considered to be a church leader tithes faithfully to Gateway Church. That means we check to see if they are giving 10% of their income to Gateway Church. We do this by having a conversation with the individual and by checking their giving records. We find that most candidates are honest during the conversation and will excuse themselves from consideration as an elder or deacon if they are not giving 10% of their income to Gateway Church.

We feel that those in church leadership who approve the church budget and speak into how we steward the money given must be giving generously to the church. Your elders and deacons are very generous. In fact, many are top givers

at Gateway Church, but know that they are not in leadership because they are top givers. I believe that they are top givers because they are leaders and are “all in” when it comes to supporting the ministry of the church they lead.

Finally, because giving is something kept private, this is often the stopping point for potential elders or deacons who are not tithing to the church. Know that we do not move forward with a leadership candidate until all of these areas, not just their giving, meet the standards we have set for our leaders. We want you to have the utmost confidence that your elders and deacons are fully engaged members of Gateway Church.

The final step in the affirmation process is our church business meeting where the members of Gateway Church affirm the candidates as their new elders and deacons. Notice that this is an affirmation; it is not an election. The reason I highlight this is because often we impose our country’s election of government officials on our church leadership process. We can have a tendency to view elders or deacons as representatives of the people in the congregation. And that is not the case.

Elders, specifically, do not represent the congregation. We don’t vote for those who will represent our ministry pet projects at the highest level of leadership in the church. This is not what elders do. This isn’t who they represent.

So who do the elders represent if it’s not the congregation? Jesus. According to our constitution, which is also our denomination’s constitution, the “primary duty of an elder is to represent the mind of Christ.” Elders, always

collectively, seek the will of God for Gateway Church and do our best to lead the congregation in faithfulness to see God's will be done.

Prior to our congregational meeting, we make the names of the elder and deacon candidates known to the congregation. The purpose of making the names public is very specific. We make the names public because we know that no process is perfect. We may miss a significant character flaw or something else that disqualifies them from serving in church leadership. We make their names public in case you know of some reason why the candidates should not serve in church leadership. Thus, if you do know a reason why someone should not serve, you should contact a church elder immediately before the congregational meeting takes place.

Two final aspects of the affirmation process are worth noting. Here at Gateway Church, we do not have term limits or rotate elders or deacons. Given that we do not have term limits for those who are serving, each year all elders and deacons do an annual evaluation with their spouse that is discussed with their fellow elders or deacons. The evaluation looks at their past year and the commitments coming up in the next year in order to together discern whether continuing as an elder or deacon is what God is asking him or her to do.

Life happens. We have young leaders who have young kids at home. Some are still growing their families. Others have aging parents who need attention. So we understand that life comes in seasons. And though we believe that someone who is a church leader is always a leader, we do see

that life sometimes requires that we take a break and step down from certain leadership roles. So we have put on the calendar a way to have this conversation among ourselves every year in order to make sure that we do not neglect other areas of our lives.

## Chapter 5

# Our Meetings

### What a Session Meeting is Like

I often wonder what people think a Session meeting is like. If you have an active imagination, you may suspect our meetings are like the scene from *A Few Good Men* where Jack Nicholson's character tells Tom Cruise's character, "You can't handle the truth!" If that tends to be how you picture elder meetings, you'll probably be sorely disappointed with what I'm about to tell you.

First things first. As of the printing of this booklet, Session meets on the fourth Tuesday of the month. We often have two months where we end up not meeting (once in the summer and December because of Christmas). An agenda and a document of various ministry department reports is sent out a week prior to our meeting.

Meetings always begin with prayer. Then, we have someone read Gateway's mission statement and our church values. We spend 5-10 minutes sharing stories of ways we have seen our mission and values lived out since our last meeting. Next, we read our Elder vision statement and spend time sharing stories of how we have lived out our vision statement since our last meeting. We then transition to our

learning time. We are always reading a book together - usually one that focuses on church leadership. We have read and discussed a few of the books listed in chapter 7. This will take up anywhere from 20-40 minutes of our time.

Next, we pray. How and what we pray about changes from month to month. Sometimes we will share personal prayer requests. Other times we will just go right into prayer trusting God's Spirit to guide us. We all share the responsibility of leading this prayer time so it isn't always the same person leading us every month. We often spend 20-30 minutes in prayer.

If you are doing the math, at this point, we are anywhere between 45 minutes to an hour and a half into our meeting. The rest of the meeting is spent updating one another on congregational situations that we may be facing. We do have some business we must do (approving of minutes, electing elders to go to denominational meetings, etc...), but most business type stuff has been delegated to staff so the elders can focus on spiritual and pastoral matters.

We close our time in prayer. And that's it.

Something that is hard to describe is the spirit in the air of the room when we meet. We enjoy being with one another. We laugh. The tone is one of encouragement.

By the way, we are always open to meeting with any church members during our meetings, especially if you are in need of prayer and would like all of the elders, together, to pray for you. Simply email or call the church office asking to meet with us.

## **What a Diaconate Meeting is Like**

Because deacons primarily “lead with their hands,” taking care of physical needs within the church, they usually meet all together as a group less frequently than the elders. As of the printing of this booklet, the entire diaconate (which is a fancy word meaning the whole board of deacons) meets once a quarter.

Deacon meetings also begin with prayer and a reminder of the purpose of deacons. According to the EPC Book of Government, “the office of deacon as set forth in Scripture is one of compassion, concern for needs, and of serving others. Therefore, the first duty of the deacon is sympathy and service.” Deacon meetings occasionally include a book study about serving as deacon or a short devotional as well.

The diaconate is split into several sub-groups, or teams, each being responsible for various aspects of services or ministry within the church. (At the time of this printing, there are 4 deacon teams: Communion, Benevolence, Service, and Food.) Each team has an opportunity in the meeting to give a brief update on what they have been involved in recently or what projects they have coming up in the future.

Diaconate meetings also involve a time of additional practical training, discussions on how to improve current processes, or suggestions for known needs that may warrant the addition of a new team in the future. The training may be something like how to use the church database to find volunteers, or what local agencies we partner with in order to

have accurate information to pass along to congregants in need.

Deacons are primarily responsible for helping to meet the practical, physical needs of our local Gateway Church family. (This is different from the focus of our Local Go department that focuses on external needs within the community.) Because of this, deacon meetings end in a time of prayer for the specific people and needs that the diaconate has been involved with over the past quarter.

## Chapter 6

### The Church as a Team

Earlier in this booklet we saw that ministry is the responsibility of all who profess faith in Jesus Christ. Because ministry is the responsibility of each of us, we must work together as a team in order to be effective.

Now teamwork is something we're all familiar with in some way or another. Though there are many kinds of great teams, many of us naturally think of sports teams. There's something about sports that unites individuals together like few other activities:

- The 1995 Dallas Cowboys with Emmitt Smith, Troy Aikman, Michael Irvin, and Deion Sanders.
- The 1986 Lakers with Magic Johnson, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, James Worthy, and Michael Cooper.
- And their great rival — the Boston Celtics — with Bird, McHale, Parish, and Walton.
- The 1984 San Francisco 49ers with Joe Montana, Ronnie Lott, Dwight Clark, and Roger Craig.

And the list could go on with the 1978 Pittsburgh Steelers, the 1975 Cincinnati Reds, the 1985 Chicago Bears,

and — if we stay in Chicago — the Michael Jordan led Bulls of the 1990s.

Each of these teams were made up of individuals who were different from each other. They came from different backgrounds and had different experiences in life, but they united together as a team because of a common goal: they wanted to win. And because no one wanted to be the weak link, each individual made personal sacrifices for the good of the entire team. Thus they showed up early, worked hard, played hard, held each other accountable, and cared about each other — all so they could win together.

Now consider the local church. If we view the church as a ministry team, the question for us at Gateway Church is, what kind of team are we? Do we represent the qualities of those great sports teams mentioned earlier — people of different backgrounds and life experiences who've united together because of a common goal: to go and make disciples of all nations? Are we a people who make sacrifices for the good of the team — personal sacrifices because of a love and commitment to Jesus Christ and the people we're connected to in this congregation? What does it even mean for a church to be a great team and how are each of us helping or hindering Gateway Church from being a great church team?

Just like any sports team, not everyone can be the quarterback or the point guard or the first baseman. We each have a role to play and instead of comparing ourselves to others on the team, we each have the opportunity to serve in our unique role faithfully.

Here at Gateway Church we're blessed with a group of faithful men and women who serve in leadership. There's the elders — men who spiritually protect and shepherd the congregation. There's the staff, whose role is to equip, train, and resource the members of the church to do the work of ministry. And there are our deacons — our lead servants. The elders, staff, deacons, and church members all have a role to play on our church team.

The elders collectively represent the mind of Christ for this church. Together they seek Christ's vision for what we're to be doing. This isn't a one man at the top of the org chart kind of team — the vision and direction of Gateway Church isn't any one person's responsibility or authority — it's the responsibility of the elders together. As is the teaching of God's Word, and the shepherding of the people, and the discipleship of the next generation, and the guarding against false doctrines, and the disciplining of those who are ensnared by sin, and the raising up of the next generation of church leadership. If the church was a football team, your elders are the head coach.

Church staff are to equip, train, and resource the church members to do the work of ministry. The staff's primary role is not to do the ministry work, but to serve the church members like resource personnel — making sure church members have what they need to do the ministry work of the church. If we were a football team, the staff would be like assistant coaches.

The deacons are our lead servants. They assist the staff and elders to make sure the ministry work that the staff

has equipped the congregation to do gets done. The deacons are key in both freeing up the elders to focus on their role of shepherding and protecting, while also freeing up the staff so they're able to equip, train, and resource the church members to do the ministry work of the church. If the church was a football team, the deacons would be all of the team personnel who assist the coaches — the nutritionists, the equipment managers, the people who make sure the field is ready to go.

And that leaves us with our church members — the key “doers of ministry” on our church team. Church members here at Gateway Church are called to serve one another. Each member is an individual who has been called by Christ to make disciples of all nations, and whose role is to do the work of ministry. Church members are the players out on the field.

Just like sports teams, there have been great ministry teams throughout history and there have been some duds. It just so happens that what makes great sports teams great is also what makes great church teams great — but with a twist. We're not playing a game for a trophy. We've got a mission and purpose given to us by Jesus Christ himself, and the Son of God came to earth to ensure that we'd have all of the resources we need in order to accomplish his mission. Each member of the team — with particular giftings and talents — has a specific role to play. No role is more or less important than the others, but all roles on the team are equally important. Every individual matters — including you, because everyone on the team is critical to our success.

## Chapter 7

### Other Questions

#### **Why do some churches have women elders?**

This is a fairly complicated question and answer. The best biblical argument, though I disagree with it, is based on Galatians 3:28. For those wanting to study the topic further, a book I would recommend is *Two Views on Women in Ministry* by James Beck (editor).

#### **Why do some churches not allow women to serve as deacons?**

Again, I would recommend *Two Views on Women in Ministry* for further study. However, I will say that the crux of this position is based on Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2:12 that we looked at earlier.

#### **Are you inconsistent in your interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:12 if you allow women to teach in Kidway, youth, lead a Life Group, etc.?**

1 Timothy 2:12 couples teaching with authority, which implies the office of elder in the church. This in no way excludes women from teaching in other areas. Additionally, both the gifts of teaching and leadership are given to both

men and women, but not all with the gifts are called to be elders in the church.

**Since 1 Corinthians 14:34 says that “women should remain silent” in the church, why does Gateway Church allow women to lead worship songs, do announcements, lead the church in prayer?**

The verses in 1 Corinthians 14 (33b-35) are best looked at in the larger context of the letter. For instance, back in chapter 11 Paul writes, "*Any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered disgraces his head. **But any woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered disgraces her head, for it is one and the same thing as having a shaved head.***" (1 Cor. 11:4-5 NET)

So which is it Paul? Are you saying women can speak in what we'd call a "church service" (1 Cor. 11), or are they to remain silent (1 Cor. 14)?

This is where we need to ask, "what is Paul specifically talking about in chapter 14?" Apparently, the church in Corinth was getting a bit disorderly when they gathered together. People were talking over one another and interrupting each other all in the name of "this is my spiritual gift." And Paul tells them that the Spirit of God is not a Spirit of disorder. That all of the Spirit's gifts are meant to strengthen the church (1 Cor. 14:26). Yet, all of the disorderliness going on, is not strengthening the church in Corinth, but is causing confusion.

One element adding to the confusion seems to be women speaking up and asking questions. That's why he tells

them to ask their husbands their question when they get home. So though it appears to be a command against all kinds of speaking, Paul is actually referring to a particular kind of speaking that some women were doing in Corinth that was causing confusion and disorder. If Paul was intending for women to never speak in the church, to always remain silent, then his earlier statement in 1 Corinthians 11 would only be adding to the confusion going on. For it's impossible for women to both "pray and prophesy" in the church and to "always remain silent."

Thus, our practice at Gateway Church is to allow women to speak during our worship services (1 Corinthians 11) while also conducting our worship services in an orderly manner (as Paul instructs in chapter 14).

**Earlier in this booklet you mention that deacons are split into different teams. What specifically do each of these teams do?**

At the time of this printing, there are four teams of deacons: Communion, Benevolence, Service, and Food.

The Communion team is responsible for preparing the communion elements and cleaning up from our monthly communion services. Each Gateway Church campus has its own Communion team.

The Benevolence team oversees the distribution of benevolence funds to those within our church family who are in need of financial assistance. Requests for assistance are received through the Care/Benevolence Request Form and assigned to a pair of deacons for follow-up. Priority for

assistance is given to church members, specifically those who are sick, handicapped, single parents, or elderly, though other members or active regular attenders may also be assisted through the fund.

The Service team helps with a variety of hands-on, physical needs within the church or the Gateway Church family. These needs include setting up Kidway spaces each weekend, shoveling church entrances on a Sunday morning, and providing building access for a variety of events held at the church. In a similar way as the Benevolence team, requests for physical help such as yardwork, help moving, or light construction help may also be received through the Care/Benevolence Request Form. These are treated with the same priority levels as the requests for benevolence funds.

Finally, the Food team is responsible for a variety of food needs within the church. These include funeral meals, and food/snacks for volunteer training and church or outreach events. A deacon also oversees the Meals Ministry, which comes alongside Life Groups to provide meals to people after a new baby is born, someone has surgery, there is a death in the family, etc.

### **What happens when someone rotates off the Session or Diaconate?**

As stated earlier, other than disqualifying oneself from the office of elder or deacon, we do not see a biblical reason for setting term limits for church leadership. However, we do realize that life circumstances may make it necessary for someone to step down from leadership. If this

happens, the individual simply becomes a regular church member once again. Depending on the circumstances, they may be asked to help with some things, like new member interviews, or serving communion, but most often they return to life as a member of the church. If an individual feels that it is time to step back into leadership after a break, we conduct an affirmation process as we would for a new elder or deacon.

### **Can a divorced person serve as an elder or deacon?**

God hates divorce. He is also gracious and merciful. We take each case on an individual basis when it comes to answering this question. Some questions that must be taken into account are 1) Did the divorce happen prior to the person believing in Jesus? 2) Were there biblical grounds for the divorce?

### **What is your Elder vision statement?**

Our primary responsibility, as elders, is to represent the mind of Christ as we spiritually lead Gateway Church. We are to collectively discern his will for our church in all our decisions. (See BOG 9.8) Additionally, we are called to be men who:

- study, learn, and teach the Word of God
- pray for and shepherd the sick, lonely, elderly, and those in need
- pray for and disciple the children and adults of the church and seek after those who become inactive

- guard against dangers to the faith and life of those under our care
- pray for, warn, admonish, and reclaim those who stray and, when necessary, enact church discipline
- seek out and raise up new leaders within the church

### **What are other leadership models used in churches?**

As opposed to having elders who lead the church together, some churches have a singular church model, where either the pastor (or the Pope) is the leader of the church. Some churches practice a congregation model, where the congregation leads the church together. For further study, see *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government* by Steven Cowan (editor).

### **What do I do if I feel called to serve as an elder or deacon at Gateway Church?**

Contact the church office. You will be put in touch with someone currently serving in leadership to begin assessing God's call on you to serve in leadership at Gateway Church.

### **Who are Gateway Church's elders and deacons?**

[www.gatewayepc.org/leadership](http://www.gatewayepc.org/leadership)

## Conclusion

Hopefully, this short booklet has provided some clarity on church leadership. Now you know what an elder is, what a deacon is, and the difference between the two. You have seen the biblical passages that speak on the topic of church leadership and, hopefully, have come to appreciate how they are our filter for those considered to serve in leadership at Gateway Church. We have even peeled back the layers of mystery and have shown you our process of training and affirming those called to leadership and given you a glimpse of what a typical elder or deacon meeting is like.

One last thing about church leaders. We need your prayers! So be praying for us as we seek God's will for our church. Pray that we will be faithful to our spouses, diligent in raising up our children to love Jesus, and devoted to our calling of watching over your souls as those who will give an account to God.



## Books and Resources

Below are some helpful books on the topic of church leadership.

### ELDERS

- *The Elder and His Work* by Dickson
- *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church* by Getz
- *Church Elders* by Rinne
- *Biblical Eldership* by Strauch
- *Gospel Eldership: Equipping a New Generation of Servant Leaders* by Thune

### DEACONS

- *The Presbyterian Deacon* by Johnson
- *Resources for Deacons: Love Expressed through Mercy Ministries* by Keller
- *Deacons: How They Serve and Strengthen the Church* by Smethurst
- *The New Testament Deacon* by Strauch
- *The Deacon: Biblical Foundation for Today's Ministry of Mercy* by Van Dam
- *Deacons: Servant Models in the Church* by Webb

## **ELDERS AND DEACONS**

- *Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons* by Anyabwile
- *Called to Serve: Essays for Elders and Deacons* by Brown

## **EPC RESOURCES**

Available for free at [www.epc.org/downloads/](http://www.epc.org/downloads/)

- *EPC Leadership Training Guide*
- *EPC Book of Order*





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