How Eldership Works at TCF

Three Foundational Elements

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Complementarian Shape. This refers to the biblical view that male and female roles in the church "complement" each other rather than conflicting or conflating. The upshot of this approach is that men, rather than women, are to be the official elders and pastors. This is clear in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus (1 Tim.3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). This view is not politically correct in some segments of western society, which generally prefers the egalitarian model (women as elders and pastors). Nevertheless, we have adopted it because the scripture seems to teach it and the arguments against it are more sociological than biblical. There is much discussion and no small amount of conflict on this issue in the broader church, of course. As Christians we should be patient with each other on these matters, but we should not apologize for doing what we believe is biblical. The Lord's instruction for how people relate together has more to do with *the way they treat each other* than the *titles they hold* (Matt.20:25-28; John 13:34-35; 1 Cor.13:1-13; Gal.5:16-25).

Communally Discerning Method. This means that an elder board can and should seek spiritual consensus (the Holy Spirit's unifying guidance) on the major directional and budgetary decisions they make. Communal Spiritual Discernment has as its goal a peaceful, unified, mission-minded (see the church mission statement), Christ-centered decision-making process. As we elders/pastors discuss, pray, and wait on the Lord, we believe that the Spirit will give us sufficient direction to sustain and nourish the flock. This is what spiritual oversight is all about. (See the TCF bylaws for specific parameters regarding the sorts of decisions the board and the staff make.)

Combined Legal and Spiritual Structure. (Again, for specifics, see the TCF Bylaws). In our country, churches are generally non-profit corporations (501C3). As such they must have a legitimate "board" to take legal responsibility for the ongoing mission of the organization, in this case the church. The Bible does not address this legal aspect specifically, since at the time of its writing such corporate entities did not exist in the way they do now. This leaves considerable latitude for churches to structure their governance, and indeed there are many different ways it is done. But the general shape of biblical leadership is clear enough, and it can blend with the legal structures of our country. Elders/Pastors are to oversee the health and mission of the church. So, most churches have a "board of elders" which fulfills both the legal and the spiritual leadership needs. Among the elders there is one "leader among equals" who is also (often) the Chief Executive Officer of the corporation. Churches usually call him the Senior or Lead Pastor. Other elders fill the secretarial and treasurer roles and work in cooperation with the Senior Pastor. Timothy and Titus are examples of "Lead Pastors" appointing, guiding, and working with elders in their respective churches. The Lead Pastor is the main theological resource, expositor, and spiritual overseer.

There are at least five different secular models of board governance for corporate organizations. For some, especially small ones, the *board* is also the *staff*. In other words, the board does the work of the organization. Slightly larger organizations have boards that function as *managers*. They set the objectives and manage daily operations. Some boards are *directors*. These make decisions regarding the general purpose and organizational objectives, but they do not exercise day-to-day operational authority. The CEO does that. Other boards function basically as *governors*. These have less input on organizational goals, leaving that to the CEO and his staff. And lastly, there are boards that are

essentially *advisors*. The advisory board stands way back, taking legal responsibility, but offering no input on the philosophical reasons, organizational priorities, or operational functions.

As I mentioned, these are *secular organizational models*. They each work in different ways and none are illegal, immoral, or ungodly. Note, however, that none of these secular models envision board members who also serve on the operational staff, (with the exception of the CEO). Yet the Bible sees elders as actually serving people within the body on a regular basis, doing hands-on-ministry. This presents a special need for navigation. How can an elder board offer insightful spiritual leadership without experiencing the stresses of daily ministry? Our answer has been to develop a modified "directors" model. As our bylaws indicate, we have structured our board with some paid elders/pastors (guys doing the day-to-day study, care, teaching, etc.) and some non-paid elders/pastors, who also offer care and various kinds of pastoral help as they can, but are not on the paid staff. These two sub-groups on the larger board must work together in the life of the church.

The key to the success of this model, which tries to fit both the biblical instructions about elders and the legal need for a "board of directors" is that all the elders, including the paid and the unpaid, realize the difference between "operations" and "board work." That means that when we are wearing our "elder/board" hats (at a board or committee meeting for instance), we are making broad, directional decisions for the church. Then, when we leave that meeting and enter into hands-on ministry, we put on our staff and pastoral hats and work under the direction of the Lead Pastor. The Lead Pastor offers spiritual leadership in both arenas, one as a "leader among equals" with the give-and-take, consensus-building and communal discernment mentioned above, and one as a daily supervisor moving the mission of the church forward through other staff.

For this unique "crossover" model to work, we need to preserve the distinction between "board decisions" and "operational decisions." But what we absolutely must do is maintain a loving, servant attitude toward one another (Matt.20:25-28). As with all things in the body of Christ, material structures are no better than the character and maturity and Christlikeness of the servant leaders within them. Which is why Paul outlines the basic shape of spiritual maturity in his instructions about the sorts of men to put into leadership (1 Tim.3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). How we treat each other is more important than what titles we use or what other needed organizational structures we put in place.