

# Fairfield Baptist Church

## Elder Board Position Description & Requirements

**Our mission:** To make disciples who make disciples by the Word of God for the glory of God to impact the world.

Fairfield Baptist Church (FBC) believes in the absolute authority, infallibility, and sufficiency of the Bible. As we strongly believe that we have been given all things that pertain to life and godliness, we look to no other source than God's word, the Bible, to inform us as to the role and qualifications of elders.

Titus 1:5–9 (ESV) - <sup>5</sup> 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— <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. <sup>9</sup> 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.

1 Timothy 3:1–7 (ESV) - <sup>1</sup> The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup> Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

1 Timothy 5:17–22 (ESV) - <sup>17</sup> Let the elders who rule well (direct the affairs of the church – NIV) be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. <sup>18</sup> For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." <sup>19</sup> Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>20</sup> As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. <sup>21</sup> In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. <sup>22</sup> Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

James 5:13–14 (ESV) - <sup>13</sup> Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.

1 Peter 5:1–5 (ESV) - <sup>1</sup> 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: <sup>2</sup> 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; <sup>3</sup> not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. <sup>5</sup> 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.”

Acts 20:17–38 (ESV) - <sup>17</sup> Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. <sup>18</sup> And when they came to him, he said to them: “You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, <sup>19</sup> serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; <sup>20</sup> how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, <sup>21</sup> testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, <sup>23</sup> except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. <sup>24</sup> But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. <sup>25</sup> And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. <sup>26</sup> Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, <sup>27</sup> for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. <sup>28</sup> Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. <sup>32</sup> And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. <sup>33</sup> I coveted no one’s silver or gold or apparel. <sup>34</sup> You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. <sup>35</sup> In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’ ” <sup>36</sup> And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. <sup>37</sup> And there was much weeping on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, <sup>38</sup> being sorrowful most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.

## **How many elders should FBC have?**

FBC is required by the bylaws to have a minimum of five elders. The Lead Pastor is an elder and is counted in that number. The actual number of elders on the Elder Board will vary from time to time depending on the availability of elders and the business the Elder Board is addressing at the time. The New Testament always appeals to a plurality of elders in the local church (Titus 1:5; Acts 14:23; 1 Tim 5:17; James 5:14). We believe it is unhealthy for both the elder and the Congregation for only one person to fulfill the role of elder within a church as it leaves them unaccountable, places undue responsibility upon them, and creates temptation for authority to be abused.

## **General Overview: Titus 1:5 and 1:9, Acts 20:28, I Peter 5:1-4, Acts 20:28-31, James 5:14**

The Elder Board has the ultimate responsibility and authority to:

1. See that the church remains on a true course biblically
2. Ensure members are being appropriately shepherded
3. Make certain the body is being fed through insightful and accurate biblical teaching
4. Establish processes that provide that the life of the church is being well managed with the assistance of other competent and godly leaders
5. Care about the spiritual and physical well-being of members, regularly praying for the sick
6. Guard the body against harmful influences, confronting those who are contradicting biblical truth or continuing in a pattern of sinful behavior
7. Shepherd the body at FBC by being an example or role model
8. Encourage and consult with staff and members

When Paul describes the office of elder in 1 Timothy 3:1, he speaks of it as a “noble task”. The word “task” means that the position involves action. It is not merely an honorary title but will require intentional effort and action. Below is a summary of the role and responsibility of the Elder Board at FBC.

**Specific Duties: The goal is not to lead FBC to become an efficient organization. The goal is to lead church members to maturity in Christ. Eph. 4:12-13**

## **Leadership**

1. Faithful attendance at the corporate gatherings of the church body and being a personal example of the expectations of church membership
2. Identifying, equipping, and calling leaders to defined positions of service to the body of FBC
3. Maintaining current knowledge about the state of ministry operations in alignment with FBC's strategy and making adjustments as appropriate
4. Participation in all meetings of the Elder Board
5. Specific ministry responsibilities agreed upon by the Elder Board

## **Teaching**

1. Consistently be in a role where communicating God's word is required
2. Be willing and available to preach God's word during services
3. Participate in sessions shaping the messages that will be delivered during weekly services
4. Provide thoughtful and prayerful feedback on sermons

## **Provide Spiritual Oversight**

1. Confront false teaching and behavior contradictory to biblical truth
2. Review and evaluate teaching and curriculums for biblical accuracy and consistency with FBC values (Children's Ministries, Bible Studies, Youth Ministries, etc.).
3. Set and/or review policy (i.e., divorce, alcohol, homosexuality, etc.).
4. Attend/support church events

## **Shepherd the Flock**

1. Participate in Step 3 of Matthew 18 process
2. Direct people into appropriate process for guidance, assistance, problem resolution
3. Reach out to frustrated members who have stopped attending or have caused dissension
4. Respond to letters/phone calls from body/staff/public
5. Facilitating and communicating to the church the vision and direction of the church
6. The elders will implement policies and processes which are reasonable and appropriate for the church's size and budget which are designed to promote the physical safety and security of participants in each ministry venue

## **Manage the Church**

1. Encourage staff and volunteers
2. Conduct staff and support staff interviews
3. Conduct exit interviews with people holding paid staff positions
4. Conduct annual review of Lead Pastor
5. Delegate work to assistants, staff and/or outside experts
6. Committed to looking for the next generation of church leaders and appropriate training of those leaders
7. Develop an annual spending plan that will reflect the priorities of the church and operates within appropriate spending parameters based on giving and attendance

## **Pray for the Sick**

1. Attend monthly elder prayer meetings
2. Visit the sick at home or in hospital in special circumstances for private counsel

## **Time Commitment:**

Monthly elder's meeting (2-4 hours)

Monthly elder's prayer meeting (1 hour)

Monthly sub-team meeting (1-2 hours)

During serious issues, which require immediate and intense effort, the hours required can reach 10+ per week. This may occur one to two times per year.

## **How are elders appointed?**

The existing elders of FBC are to be constantly seeking to identify and train potential leaders. In particular, they are to seek godly men who have demonstrated a natural inclination towards caring for and spiritually nurturing others in the church.

At such point that the existing elders believe they have a candidate who is ready to serve the church in the capacity of elder (and the candidate is willing), they are to run that candidate through a course training them in the requirements and expectations of being an elder (such as Alexander Strauch's *Biblical Eldership*) and then if the candidate is still willing, put forward the elders' proposal to appoint the candidate as an elder to the congregation. This must be announced during church services and by other electronic means over a period of three weeks. The elders are to encourage all congregation members to seek God in prayer and to give the current elders feedback on the proposed candidate. If the feedback of the congregation is in support of the appointment (including that no disqualifying accusations have been raised), the elder will be formally and publicly inducted to the church's Elder Board during a church service.

## **How long do elders serve?**

An elder's term is for a period of three years as long as he continues to meet the above requirements. After three years, if the Elder Board believes that the candidate is still the right person for the role, they can recommend to the congregation the re-appointment of the elder for an additional year. Like their initial appointment, all congregational feedback will be considered and a decision made by the Elder Board. An elder is limited to a maximum of four years before taking a year away from the Elder Board. An elder may choose to stand down at any point or may be asked to stand down for any of the reasons shown below.

## Removal from the Elder Board

An elder's position is ongoing until one of the following four things happen:

1. Death
2. The elder requests to stand down from the Elder Board. This can be for any reason but may include poor health, family matters (or other responsibilities) requiring more attention, personal struggles. etc.
3. The elder no longer meets the requirements of an elder as shown above and their position is terminated either temporarily or permanently (depending on the situation) by the Elder Board.
4. The elder has reached the end of his term, at which point the elder must take at least one year off.

## Removal as an Elder

An elder's position as an elder is ongoing until one of the following three things happen.

1. Death
2. The elder requests to stand down from the role of elder. This can be for any reason but may include poor health, family matters (or other responsibilities) requiring more attention, personal struggles etc.
3. The elder no longer meets the requirements of an elder as shown above and their position is terminated either temporarily or permanently (depending on the situation) by the Elder Board

## Recommended Reading on Elders

Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (Littleton: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1995) \* There is also a Study Guide for this book and a Mentor's Guide.

Further information available at <http://biblicalEldership.com/>

Jeramie Rinne, *Church Elders: How to shepherd God's people like Jesus* (Crossway Books, 2014)

Mark Dever, *By Whose Authority?* (9 Marks) – Available as a free PDF from 9 Marks.

## **FBC Elder Requirements:**

The requirements for the Biblical office of elder are laid out in the Bible in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Fairfield Baptist Church (FBC) firmly believes in the inerrancy and sufficiency of Scripture and seeks to align all church government, beliefs, and practices accordingly. The word “elder” is synonymous with “pastor”, “bishop”, “presbyter”, and “overseer”, referring to the same Biblical office. Different words are used to emphasize various functions of the office (ex: teaching, preaching, shepherding, oversight, etc.). The biblical requirements focus on the character and behavior of the men serving in this role rather than the responsibilities. Elders are recognized by their demonstration of consistent, biblical character in all areas of their lives so as to be “above reproach”. Elders at FBC are ordained (or set apart) for service in this office after evaluation of their beliefs, character, behavior, and reputation. While each man is different and vetting must be done on a case-by-case basis, this document seeks to present FBC-specific interpretations of the various requirements, with positions on controversial topics included where possible. This document is intended as a guideline for future elders when evaluating new prospective elders.

### **1 Timothy 3:1-7**

“<sup>3</sup> The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup> Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.”

### **Titus 1:5-9**

<sup>5</sup> 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— <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. <sup>9</sup> 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.

The requirements are laid out in order below, beginning with 1 Timothy 3:1-7, followed by the unique requirements from Titus 1:5-9.

1. “aspires to the office of overseer” – This does not simply mean someone who wants the position. Often those who enthusiastically seek positions of authority have an unhealthy desire for power. The clearest indication that someone desires the role of Elder is that they are already naturally engaged in caring for and spiritually nurturing people within the church.
2. “above reproach” – This requirement is listed in 1 Timothy and in Titus as a summary of all requirements. An elder must not be open to accusation of heinous sin. Their character must be such that anyone who knows them would be resistant to believe accusation of sin. No man apart from Christ is perfect, but an elder must not be stained by grievous sin or anything to bring shame on the Church or denigrate its authority.
3. “husband of one wife” – This requirement is controversial, with various interpretations addressed in part by our interpretation. FBC does not view this as an explicit requirement to be married (as this would have disqualified Paul and Timothy and contradicted biblical teaching on dedication to ministry and gifting); neither does FBC view divorce as a necessary disqualifying event either before or after conversion (depends on circumstances). In context, this requirement is forbidding polygamy, as was common practice among the Jews at the time of writing (and almost lawful). The principle, as applied at FBC, is to ensure marital fidelity and sexual purity. Married men should be faithful to their spouse. All men should be sexually pure and abstain from all forms of sexual immorality (including pornography).
4. “sober-minded” – Elders must have sound judgment and clear thinking. They must not be carried away by outside forces or figuratively drunk.
5. “self-controlled” – Elders must manage themselves well, controlling their emotions, behavior, and tongue. They must be reasonable and exercise appropriate judgment. This requirement is related to “disciplined” found in Titus.
6. “respectable” – Elders must be thought of well by both those inside and outside of the church. Their character and behavior should inspire respect and admiration.
7. “hospitable” – This requirement is specifically dealing with strangers. At the time of writing, it was necessary for churches to support each other. This is still true today and elders should model this behavior for the entire body, willingly sharing their possessions and home with outsiders in need and caring for humanity.
8. “able to teach” – This requirement is unique (along with not being a recent convert) as something not expected of every believer. Elders must not only have biblical knowledge, but they must also be able to communicate it to others. This requires elders to have skill in teaching, whether it is regularly exercised or not.
9. “not a drunkard” – This can also be interpreted, “not addicted to wine.” FBC does not view alcohol or drinking to be inherently sinful. Drunkenness, or drinking in excess so as to lose inhibition to sin and self-control, is condemned in Scripture and warned about in many places. Elders must exercise discretion and wise use of alcohol (if at all) to model appropriate self-control and character for the body. Regular drinking in excess (to a point of being labelled a drunkard) would be disqualifying. Physical addiction to alcohol



(or other substances in principle) would be disqualifying. Occasional, controlled, appropriate drinking is acceptable and modelled by Christ in Scripture.

10. “not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome” – Elders must not be quick-tempered and ready to fight. Their disposition should be gentle. Those inside and outside of the church should not be afraid to interact with an elder or have scorn for the Church. They must be peaceable. This requirement is related to “not quick-tempered” found in Titus.
11. “not a lover of money” – This requirement does not preclude the rich from serving, but speaks to the desire and motivation of obtaining money. Elders must not be driven by a desire to become rich, as this is the root of all evil. Elders should be generous with their finances and not center their lives around wealth and luxury. This requirement is related to “not greedy for gain” found in Titus.
12. “manage his household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive” – This requirement does not require an elder to have children (or be married as covered above). The manner in which a man runs his household (regardless of the size of his immediate family) indicates the manner in which he will run the church. The behavior and submissiveness of the children (as applicable) also indicate how well trained and adapted the man is for governing the Church. He should be the leader of a well-ordered household. If he has children, they should be well-disciplined and submissive.
13. “not be a recent convert” – This requirement prevents recent Christians from serving as elders, to prevent pride and condemnation. The time is subjective but should be years and not months. Humility should be a well-established virtue. This requirement is related to “not arrogant” found in Titus.
14. “well thought of by outsiders” – The character and behavior of an elder must be admirable not only to those within the church, but by those outside as well. This requirement is subjective, along with several others. The entirety of a man’s life should be evaluated, including his reputation, when considering service in this office.
15. “his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination” – This requirement is similar to 12 above. He must run his household well. The faith of his children, while not directly controlled by the prospective elder, is generally indication of good spiritual leadership within the home.
16. “lover of good” – An elder must love doing good works and seeing the fruit of his service to the church.
17. “upright” – An elder must be concerned with fairness and justice for all people.
18. “holy” – An elder must be devoted to Christ and live a life set apart from the evil ways of the world. He should be disciplined spiritually and consistently strive for godliness in his daily life.
19. “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” – See 8 above. This requires more than the ability to effectively communicate spiritual knowledge; he must also be able to recognize error and correct it.