



FOUNDATIONS OF LEADERSHIP:

**A Report on the Biblical and Theological
Foundations of Leadership in the Local Church**

*Completed by the Pastor/Elder Team
of Mountainview Church*

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Introduction

In Matthew 16:18-19, Jesus makes a foundational declaration about the church when he states, *“on this rock, I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”*

The other NT authors, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pick up this theme regularly, calling the church Jesus’ body and his bride, and painting a picture of the scene in heaven when the church is presented to Jesus as a radiant and spotless bride.

The upshot of this teaching is clear: the local church is the hope of the world. The church is God’s chosen instrument of kingdom fulfillment, and the way in which he is bringing about his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

Nothing can change the declaration that Jesus has made about his church, and no external force can amend God’s sovereign decree.

Because of what God has done through Jesus and because of what is true about the church, another fact emerges: the church has the responsibility, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, to follow Jesus’ example and be the very best manifestation of God’s plan that it can possibly be. The church has the privilege and the obligation to carry out God’s will and to do so in a way that shows forth the truth of God’s kingdom.

The question of how to do this effectively is the basis of this report. As your elders, we have wrestled with this question at length, praying, reading, and listening to expert advice. What we present here is our best understanding of the issue, based both in the teaching of Scripture and in what we believe is necessary for this congregation at this time.

Foundations

At the outset of this report, we wish to make five foundational statements that guide the question of leadership.

First and foremost, we begin with the unshakable conviction that God desires Mountainview Church to flourish, and to do so for his glory. God has called this group of people together in this place and at this time for a purpose, and that purpose is to achieve kingdom outcomes so that the name of Jesus will be honoured and exalted here.

Second, we believe that good leadership, effective organization, and continual communication are essential divine gifts for missional advancement.

Third, we believe that mutual submission in love and service is a critical value, without which the mission cannot advance. For those who follow Jesus, submission to his divine leadership is an essential component of life, and we believe that this kind of submission should be present in the church as well.

Fourth, we believe that the body of Christ must demonstrate mutual respect because we recognize that God's Spirit is resident in each follower of Jesus. When we allow disrespect to persist, we are not only showing disrespect to each other, but also to God.

Fifth, we believe that continual prayer is essential to the missional enterprise of the church. We believe that we must be in prayer consistently, seeking God's guidance and correcting our trajectory when we're off course.

In his letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul describes many of the above ideas in his description of the proper functioning of the church.

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

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 (Eph. 4:1-7, 11-16).

Later, Paul goes on to say, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (5:1-2).

He adds later,

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (5:15-21).

In summary, the NT discussions about the church and its leadership give a very clear statement of our identity as the assembly of the Messiah. The NT describes the church in terms of who we currently (an assembly of sinful, yet redeemed human beings) are in light of who we will eternally be (the spotless and radiant bride of our great Saviour).

Because this is true, the local church must organize its work in order to speak God's kingdom truth to the community around us. We want to mirror the character of God and his perfect desires. And while we will never achieve the perfect ideal in this life, we continue to strive toward it so that the kingdom mission that Jesus himself established can be carried out in this place.

The Biblical and Theological Framework for Leadership

With those five foundational statements in mind, we can outline the conclusions at which we've arrived with respect to the biblical and the theological framework for leadership within the local congregation.

Speaking broadly, we have attempted to answer three important questions with respect to leadership within the church:

1. Where does decision-making authority reside in the local congregation?
2. What is the role of leaders in the decision-making process?
3. What qualifies individuals to serve as leaders within the local congregation?

The six principles we describe below seek to answer these questions and to describe some concrete ways in which we believe leadership can work within our church.

Principle 1: Congregational Authority

The first principle addresses the first of our three questions, and what we believe to be the most foundational question of the entire exercise: where does authority reside within the local congregation?

The first and most important answer to this question is that ultimate authority in the church resides with Jesus, the head of the body, *“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.”* (Eph. 4:16)

The question of authority, then, is perhaps better phrased as, “How is Jesus’ divine authority exercised within the local congregation?” Historically, three answers to this question have emerged, with several variations within the main categories.

First, there is what’s known as the Episcopal model, which is characteristic of the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, and Eastern Orthodox churches. In this model, ultimate authority rests with a single person, who sits at the top of an organizational hierarchy (i.e., the Pope). Each individual congregation is an extension of the larger organization, and individual congregations are limited in their decision-making ability.

Second, there’s what’s known as the Presbyterian, or elder-led model, which is practiced in the Presbyterian, Reformed, and various Evangelical denominations. In this model, divine authority is exercised through the office of the elder. Each individual congregation is part of a denomination, and decisions that affect local congregations are generally made at a denominational level and are binding on congregations.

Third, there’s the Congregational model (comprised of Church Membership), which is practiced by many Evangelical denominations and Fellowships, and is a hallmark of the Baptist theological heritage. In this model, each congregation is a complete church in and of itself, and is entirely capable under the Holy Spirit to regulate its own affairs. While Congregational churches gather together into “denominations,” those larger groups serve in an advisory capacity, and cannot make decisions that are binding on the local congregations.

Each of these models can be argued biblically, and each has its pros and cons. However, the question of authority must be answered if a congregation is to effectively fulfill its kingdom mission.

As Baptists, we hold to the third model of Congregationalism. We believe that authority within the local congregation rests with the congregation, and that the congregation is responsible, under the headship of Jesus, to make all decisions pertaining to its ministry and mission.

There are two implications of this statement that we need to explore briefly before moving on to the next points.

First, Congregationalism is not the same as democracy, at least not in the way we conceive it politically. As followers of Jesus, each of us is responsible to submit our lives and wills to the mission of Jesus and to listen to the guidance and direction of the Holy Spirit in our lives and decision making.

Because of this, Congregationalism isn't a democratic system per se, but rather a monarchical democracy. Congregations make decisions by voting and generally speaking the majority rules. However, Congregationalism isn't properly exercised if those decisions don't reflect the will and desire of God. It is, therefore, each member's privilege and obligation to participate in listening to the will of the Spirit, prayerfully considering his leading, and then speaking and acting in support of that direction.

Second, Congregationalism doesn't imply micromanagement, and it's important to note that authority rests with the congregation when the congregation is gathered together to make decisions. The congregation makes decisions together, sets direction together, and takes responsibility together to see those decisions come to fruition.

The system only functions, therefore, when each member agrees to make decisions that are in the best interest of the whole congregation.

In summary, the question of authority within the congregation is vital to the proper organization of any church. We hold to the position of congregational authority, which, when properly exercised, enables each local congregation to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit, to follow the divine leadership of King Jesus, and to decide and act in such a way as to bring glory to the Father.

Principle 2: Shared Governance

Having addressed the question of where decision-making authority resides, the next question has to do with the role of leaders within that system. What is the role of leaders within a congregational system?

The key is this: while the congregation has the right and responsibility to make every decision concerning its life and mission, the entire congregation does not make every decision. Instead, the Bible teaches that the congregation works together with a group of leaders to move the mission of the kingdom forward. The congregation vests its authority in such leaders who make decisions in certain key areas on behalf of the congregation and with accountability to the congregation (we describe these key areas in principle 6 below).

We believe that the Bible's teaching in this area is clear: God has specifically called and appointed certain individuals to serve in formal roles of leadership within the congregation.

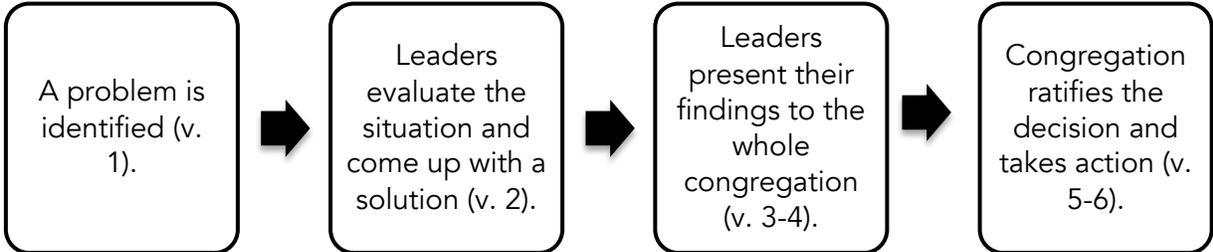
Within the context of a Congregational system, the role of these leaders is to apply spiritual wisdom and discernment to various matters, and either to make decisions on behalf of the congregation if the congregation has vested its authority in that area, or to guide the congregation to make good decisions.

The interaction between a congregation and its leaders is known as “governance,” which can be defined as “the process by which a congregation makes the decisions that identify and renew its mission, implement the mission, and assess the degree to which the mission is being attained.”

Biblical Examples of Governance in Action

There are several places in Scripture where we see the process of shared governance taking place, and from which we can draw important principles. The first one we find is in Acts 6, where Luke describes a complaint that rose up among the Gentile Christians who felt that their widows were receiving unfavourable treatment in the distribution of food.

The process of resolving this conflict looked something like this:



We can learn a great deal about congregational problem solving from this example. First, we note that the leaders of the church took responsibility to assess the situation at hand and arrive at a solution.

Second, we note that the leaders then presented their solution to the whole assembly, and that the assembly was responsible to ratify the solution at which the leaders had arrived. Because the leaders had arrived at a good decision—one that honoured the people and demonstrated the character of God—the people received it enthusiastically.

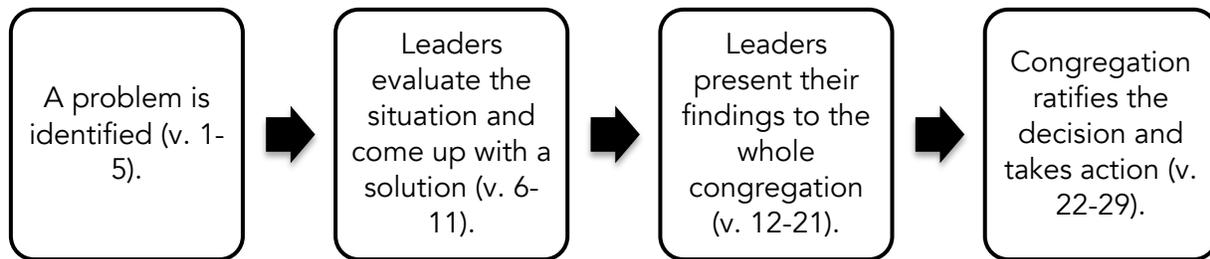
It is critical, therefore, for there to be mutual submission and mutual respect involved in the decision-making process. In this system, leaders try to discern solutions that will be acceptable to the whole congregation (i.e., they make the decisions they believe the congregation itself would make), and the congregation honours the work done by their leaders by listening carefully to the solution and testing it by the Holy Spirit.

Third, we note that the congregation took the responsibility to act on the recommendations made by their leaders. This is the difference between delegating congregational authority and vesting authority in leaders.

When authority is delegated, the problem becomes the leaders' to resolve; when authority is vested, the responsibility to resolve the issue remains firmly in the hands of the congregation, with the leaders guiding the congregation to decision and action.

A second example of shared governance can be found in Acts 15, where Luke records a disagreement around a point of theology with respect to whether Gentile Christians were required to follow the OT law.

We see the same process at work here as in the previous example:



As in the first example, the same principles of proactive leadership, mutual respect and submission, and congregational ownership of the solution can be seen. What's notable in this example is that the issue at hand was far more contentious than the matter of food distribution, yet the wise action of the leaders and the congregation prevented this issue from compromising the missional effectiveness of the young church.

Along with these two specific case studies in shared governance, the NT contains several allusions to the process. Examples include 1 Corinthians 5, where Paul hears of a sin issue in the church and presents his solution to the congregation through his letter, expecting them to take action. Paul takes a similar approach in 2 Corinthians 6 in his discussion of the monetary collection for famine relief in Jerusalem. Additionally, in Romans 16:17-20 Paul gives instruction to the congregation with respect to their actions toward those who cause divisions over doctrine in the church, and, again, he expects the congregation to act.

The final biblical example of shared governance comes from Jesus himself, who describes in Matthew 18 the process of confronting sin within the church. The process of confrontation begins on a person-to-person level, which will hopefully lead to resolution, but if not, then the church and its leaders must take a more prominent role. Again, this is the process of shared problem-solving and decision-making, which is known as governance.

Shared Governance in the 21st Century

We believe that the process of shared governance modeled in the NT is one that we must strive to accomplish. The biblical evidence shows that decisions that are made in this way allow the church to maintain its missional focus and remain unified.

The key for us as we bring this teaching into the 21st century is to translate the principles of shared governance into a cultural context that is very different from the 1st century. Churches today are required to make decisions that are considerably more complex than those faced by the NT churches, and the number of these decisions is far more numerous than in the early church. Churches must pay bills, hire employees and contractors, track income and expenses, issue tax receipts, run ministry programs, and make myriad other decisions that were unknown to the NT churches.

In this new cultural reality, it is simply not practical to put every decision before the congregation for ratification before action is taken. Such an approach would require so many congregational meetings that it would prevent us from moving the mission forward effectively.

This considered, we must clearly delineate the areas in which the congregation vests its authority to its leaders and which issues are important enough that they always need to come to the congregation for ratification.

Shared governance works when each of us is committed to communicating honestly and openly with one another, and where no decisions are made in secret or are beyond the scope of congregational accountability. The nature of certain leadership discussions is occasionally confidential, but even then the process of decision-making can be discussed without violating confidences.

Therefore, mutual trust is created when various entities within the congregation have clearly defined authority to make decisions on behalf of the congregation in specific areas. Furthermore, processes are put in place to ensure that this authority is exercised in an appropriate way, at the right time, and on the right issues.

Principle 3: Leadership Qualifications

Having discussed the principles of congregational authority and shared governance, the next question that arises concerns the way in which leaders are identified and appointed. What qualifies leaders to exercise leadership within the local congregation?

We believe that the most important qualification for leadership within the church is evidence of Christian character. This applies to any who would aspire to leadership within the church, irrespective of the office that they hold or the role that they fulfill.

What does it mean for a person to give evidence of Christian character? In a way, the answer is simple: if the person's attitudes and actions are in line with the character of Jesus and there is evidence of spiritual fruit in their lives, then they show Christian character.

To be more specific, the Bible teaches that leadership is expressed within a framework of sacrificial love, dedicated service, truthfulness, humility, mutual submission, encouragement, and perseverance.

To speak of more specific leadership roles, we offer the following from 1 Timothy 3:2-13 and Titus 1:5-9.

Elder/Overseer (Pastor-Elder Team)

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 (1 Tim. 3:1-7).

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 (Titus 1:5-10).

Deacon/Servant Leader (Board, Ministry Leaders & Community Group Facilitators)

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 (1 Tim. 3:8-13).

In addition to these familiar passages, other statements of qualification for various leadership roles exist throughout the NT.

Peter, for example, emphasizes the idea of care and shepherding: *“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and 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”* (1 Pt. 5:1-2).

The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes the importance of teaching and example giving: *“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their life and imitate their faith”* (13:7).

In his instructions to the elders in Ephesus, Paul focuses on the importance of protection: *“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. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore, be alert...”* (Acts 20:28-31a).

As already stated, then, we believe that the most important qualification for leadership within a local congregation is evidence of Christian character. As leaders, we wish to be people who set an example in our faith and in our life, demonstrating in word and in deed the character of our God.

Leadership is a high calling; in fact, James advises, *“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness”* (3:1). Furthermore, we read in 1 Timothy, *“The saying is trustworthy: if any one aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task”* (3:1).

The purpose of stating the qualifications for leadership positions isn't to set an impossibly high standard, nor do we believe that any who become leaders are without fault. As Paul states, *“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,”* (Rom. 3:23). But while all of us are sinners, Paul also states that we are all *“justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith”* (Rom. 3:24-25a).

The key to leadership isn't perfection, but rather faith that God is at work in spite of our imperfections. We will never measure up to God's perfect standard, but when we fail we will humbly admit our fault and grasp the forgiveness offered by the grace of God.

Principle 4: The Clear Responsibilities of the Church Board

The above three principles addressed the questions of where authority resides, how leaders and congregations work together, and what qualifies individuals for leadership positions within the church. The next three principles bring the first three into focus, identifying the ways in which we see the biblical principles being expressed within our congregation.

Our current bylaws state, "Mountainview Church Membership shall elect a Board to govern the practical and material affairs of Mountainview Church." It also states, "The Elders along with the Pastor(s) are responsible for the spiritual well-being of Mountainview church." What's more, we have a third category of leadership within the church—the ministry leaders and Community Group Facilitators—who are not mentioned in the bylaws.

We believe that the intention of our bylaws is to differentiate between two specific leadership functions within the church that are both necessary in order to move the mission forward: administrative leadership and ministry leadership. We want to be careful to avoid an artificial distinction between so-called spiritual leadership and other leadership, because all leadership within the church is spiritual.

Our conclusion is that two separate groups best carry out these two broad tasks. However, we should clearly define which responsibilities fall under the purview of each group.

We believe that the church board as servant leaders is responsible to exercise administrative leadership over the church. "Administrative leadership" consists of more than simply making sure the books are balanced and the bills are paid. In addition to those things, the responsibility of the board is to facilitate the process of decision-making for the congregation with respect to the mission and vision of the church, communicating decisions to the congregation as they are made.

Their primary role of the board is that of navigation. They take a big-picture perspective on the church and its mission, taking into consideration the current composition of the church, the gifts and skills of those who call it home, and the external factors that affect mission (i.e., legislation, cultural issues, and the like).

The board consists of directors and officers: qualified men and women who have demonstrated the spiritual qualifications necessary for the task of congregational leadership described above. The chair leads the board, but the board members are individually accountable to one another, to act in the best interests of the congregation and to fulfill their roles.

Principle 5: The Clear Responsibilities of the Pastor-Elder Team

The other area of leadership within the congregation is ministry leadership, and this task is the responsibility of the Pastor-Elder Team who work together as a team to do the work of spiritual care and ministry leadership.

The elders carry the responsibility for the spiritual health and oversight of the congregation, and their primary role is to love and shepherd the flock, which includes encouragement, exhortation, teaching, truth-telling, equipping and the like. The elders also function as the primary ministry leadership body within the church, working together to move the mission of the church forward, working with board to set strategic goals.

The Role of Pastors

Having studied these two leadership positions, we believe that the NT makes no clear distinction between the roles of the pastor and the elder. For this reason, we believe that the two roles must be seen as cooperative, and suggest that we use the term Pastor-Elder Team.

Further, we believe that the responsibility to ensure the proper function of the Pastor-Elder Team lies with the lead pastor. The lead pastor is accountable to the elders and the board, to carry out the strategic goals and objectives that have been established.

We believe the role of pastor-elder is assigned to qualified men who demonstrate the evidence of Christian character as previously described.

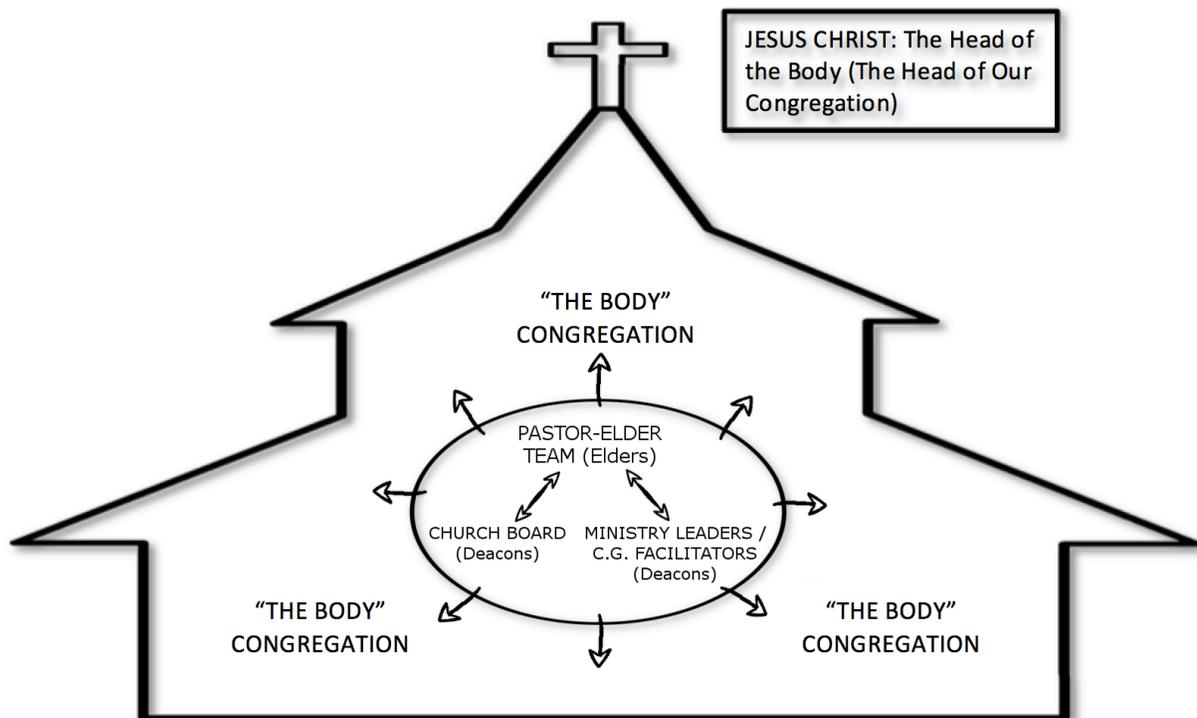
Establishing Ministry Leaders & Community Group Facilitators

The Pastor-Elder Team are, as described above, the primary ministry leadership team within the congregation, and are responsible to oversee the ministries of the church to fulfill the strategic goals of the church and advance its mission.

In order to carry out this function, the Pastor-Elder Team may choose to seek out leaders and facilitators over specific ministry areas when the need arises. These ministry leaders and Community Group Facilitators are empowered to lead their specific ministry area according to their skill, experience, and personality. Ministry leaders and Community Group Facilitators report directly to the lead pastor, but their accountability is to the Pastor-Elder Team as a whole.

The Leadership Picture

Having discussed the various leadership roles that we believe are necessary in this church, it may be helpful to present the information visually. The following diagram represents the structural picture that we have described above:



Principle 6: The Clear Responsibilities of Decision Making

The final step in this process is to outline the specific decisions that lie within the purview of each group: congregation, board, and the Pastor-Elder Team. The following lists describe which specific decisions we believe should rest with each group.

Congregation

Generally speaking, the congregation should always have direct input into decisions that impact it directly, or that require action from the congregation broadly. Such issues would include:

- Calling, electing or removal of Board Members and the Pastor-Elder Team.
- Approving the annual operating budget.
- Making decisions with respect to the purchase or sale of property.
- Approving the church's mission and vision.
- Approving the criteria for church membership and ratifying decisions regarding the removal of members.
- Approving changes to the constitution and bylaws.
- Determining whether and to what extent to incur debt.
- Making any and all other decisions not specifically vested in other groups.

Board

In accordance with the description of the board's task, the following decisions can be made by the board and acted upon without the congregation's direct approval:

- Approving non-budgeted expenses up to a pre-determined limit.
- Creating policy to guide the church's ministries.
- Compiling the annual operating budget for congregational approval.
- Appointing auditors (when necessary).
- Providing leadership in all other areas of congregational life not specifically assigned to the congregation and/or the Pastor-Elder Team.

Pastor-Elder Team

As the group responsible to move the mission of the church forward, the Pastor-Elder Team can make the following decisions without seeking direct approval from the board and/or the congregation:

- Setting and measuring ministry goals.
- Overseeing ministry expenses (outside of salary and benefits) per the congregation's approved budget.
- Acting to build up, preserve, and maintain the spiritual health of the church, including but not limited to preaching, teaching, discipleship, evangelism, gift discernment, and discipline.
- Recruiting and providing training for Ministry Leaders, Community Group Facilitators and volunteers.
- Implementing the prescribed ministry goals.