

In 2015, PMPBC voted unanimously to move from having only one pastor to having a plurality of pastors.

What is a pastor?

In Scripture, there are only two offices of the church, the office of elder and deacon (1 Tim. 3:1-13). The terms *elder*, *pastor*, and *overseer* are used interchangeably throughout the New Testament to refer to the same leadership position (Acts 20:17-28; 1 Pet. 5:1-3). This means that a pastor is an elder, an elder is an overseer, and an overseer is a pastor. In Scripture, these terms are synonymous.

One passage where all three of these terms are used interchangeably is 1 Peter 5:1-3. This passage among others demonstrates that an elder is called by God to pastor and to oversee his congregation:

1 Peter 5:1-3 - 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.

Each of these three terms provides a different emphasis and clarification about God's intention for this office:

An **elder** is a person of responsibility, leadership, and authority in both the Jewish and Christian communities.

1 Tim. 5:17 - Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching

An **overseer** is one who has the responsibility of seeing to it that something is done in the correct way. It can also be defined as a steward or guardian of a household.

Titus 1:7 - For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach...

1 Thess. 5:12 - We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work

A **pastor** is one who is responsible for the care and guidance of a Christian congregation.

Eph. 4:11 - [Christ] gave [to the church] 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

Who can serve as a pastor?

The qualifications for a pastor can be found in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 as well as Titus 1:5-9. These passages enable us to develop a list of character qualifications that are essential for the office of an elder.

A pastor must be:

- Male
- Faithful husbands (if they are married) and chaste/abstinent (if they are not)

- Fathers to children raised in the Lord (if they have children)
- Reasonable, calm, “long-tempered”
- Self-controlled, self-disciplined, and gentle
- Possessing of good reputations
- Able to teach and preach
- Knowledgeable in biblical doctrine
- Able to discern between true and false teachings
- Willing to correct and rebuke false doctrine
- Hospitable

A pastor must not be:

- Greedy
- Arrogant
- Short-tempered or contentious
- Addicted to drugs or drinking
- A recent convert to the faith

What does a pastor do?

Scripture reveals that a pastor has several different roles:

- A pastor preaches and teaches sound doctrine to the church. This is his primary role. (For scriptural support see: Acts 6:4; Col. 1:28; Eph. 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:24-25; 4:2; Tit. 1:9)
- A pastor protects the church from false teachers and bad theology. This role is closely connected with his first. (For scriptural support see: Acts 20:28-30; Tit. 1:9; 2:15)
- A pastor prays for the individual church members and the congregation as a whole on a regular basis. (For scriptural support see: Acts 6:2-4; Js. 5:14)
- A pastor is called by God to lead and oversee the direction of the church so that the church is fulfilling the Great Commission. (For scriptural support see: 1 Tim. 5:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-3; Heb. 13:17)
- A pastor equips the church members so that they can minister to others. (For scriptural support see: Eph. 4:11-12)
- A pastor cares for and counsels the individual members of the flock. (For scriptural support see: Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2)
- A pastor visits and prays for the sick and persecuted members of the church. (For scriptural support see: Js. 5:14)
- A pastor serves as a model for godly living. (For scriptural support see: 1 Cor. 11:1; 1 Tim. 3:1-7; 1 Tim. 4:11-13; Titus 2:7; 1 Peter 5:2)

Why should a church have a plurality of pastors?

Pastoring is such a demanding and weighty task that God in his wisdom has determined that every local church needs a plurality of pastors.

1) A plurality of pastors is **biblical**.

In Scripture, the task of pastoring is never entrusted to one individual, but rather to a group of men who are called, competent, and qualified for the task. Each time the word “church” is used in conjunction with “pastor”, the term for pastor is always plural.

*Titus 1:5 - This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order and appoint **elders** in every town.*

*Acts 14:23 - And when they had appointed **elders for them in every church**, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.*

Acts 15:4 - When [Paul and Barnabas] came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the **elders**, and they declared all that God had done with them.

Acts 20:17 - Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called **the elders of the church** to come to him.

Philippians 1:1 - ...To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the **overseers** and deacons...

James 5:14 - Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for **the elders of the church**, and let them pray over him

Scripture, rather than one's culture or tradition, should govern the church in all its doctrine and practices. And the clear and consistent pattern of Scripture is that a plurality of pastors should teach, lead and care for the church. Of course, this doesn't mean every pastor must be a paid staff member. Some men should serve as lay elders and not receive any financial compensation.

2) A plurality of pastors is **beneficial**.

There are numerous practical benefits for having multiple pastors. Of course, this shouldn't come as a surprise because there are always numerous blessings for following God's pattern. Below are several practical benefits for having more than one pastor.

- It shares the burden of ministry, which prevents the solo pastor from burnout or depression.
- It prevents the solo pastor from doing something irrational or unwise.
- It provides the solo pastor with a pastor, which every Christian needs.
- It protects the solo pastor from accumulating too much authority. A group of godly pastors appropriately dilute the authority of one individual.
- It offsets the weaknesses and deficiencies of the solo pastor. No pastor is equipped or able to do everything well. And a group of pastors help offset the individual pastor's weaknesses and provides more competency, perspective, and skills.
- It provides the church with leadership in case of an absence of the solo pastor. If something were to happen to the senior pastor having a group of pastors already established and recognized by the church will ensure that ministry and mission of the church will continue.
- It makes the pastoral care more efficient and more effective. As a church grows, the difficulty in appropriately and effectively caring for the congregation becomes more and more difficult for one person to handle. A plurality of elders shares this load, ensuring more people receive the pastoral care they need. In short, more shepherds means more shepherding will take place.

Pragmatism should never drive a congregation's ecclesiology (or any other matter within the church). But it shouldn't come as a surprise that following God's design for his church is full of practical benefits.

3) A plurality of pastors is **baptist**.

Many Baptist churches are hesitant to adopt a plurality of pastors because they think this model isn't Baptist. But that is actually not true. A quick survey of church history shows this was, at one time, a very common Baptist practice.

For example, W.B. Johnson, the first president of the SBC, wrote a book on church life and polity, entitled "The Gospel Developed". In this book he strongly argued for a plurality of elders in every local church. The reason is because he saw this practice as both biblical and beneficial. He recognized that in Scripture "each [New Testament] church had a plurality of elders." He went on to assert that, "A plurality in the bishopric is of great importance for mutual

counsel and aid, that the government and edification of the flock may be promoted in the best manner.”

These are the reasons why I led our church to move away from the lone pastor model to a plurality of pastors. And after almost a year of training 4 qualified men, we are preparing to introduce them to you this Sunday Night at our 5 PM Members' Meeting.