

Biblical Leadership: Moving Forward Together

At Shawnee Bible Church, we value biblically recognized leadership among the congregation (cf. Philippians 1:1). For gospel ministry to be accomplished effectively in and through the local church, it must be led well—similarly to the fact that no one will organize for battle if the bugle produces an indistinct sound (cf. 1 Corinthians 14:8). We believe God has established two leadership offices in the local church: elders and deacons, who lead the church in spiritual health and spiritual service, respectively.

While we recognize diverse models of church government have been practiced throughout history and in our present day, we believe that the New Testament portrays the core leadership unit in the local church as being a plurality of elder/shepherds who skillfully exercise servant oversight over the congregation being careful to remain free from compulsion and selfish gain (1 Peter 5:1–4). The qualifications of these individuals are the subject of extensive instruction by the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. We believe elders are to be men who are mature in the faith, having demonstrated faithful conviction in biblical theology, tested character that is above reproach, and proven competence in teaching and leading others.

We do not see elder leadership as the same thing as a board of directors. The biblical concept of an elder is pastoral. Elders “shepherd the flock of God” (Acts 2:28 and 1 Peter 5:2), which includes spiritually feeding protecting, leading, rescuing, healing, and providing for the needs of the sheep. We do not see an essential difference between the terms “elder and “pastor.” Our elder team is comprised of “staff elders” (pastors) and “lay elders” who serve on a volunteer basis.

While not directly referring to elders and deacons, we believe Acts 6 portrays the correct (and emerging) pattern for local church leadership where the apostles remained devoted “to prayer and the ministry of the Word” (Acts 6:4) while seven service-oriented men were selected for caring for physical needs among the congregation (the basic pattern for elders and deacons respectively). Hence, we see deacons functioning as leaders and caregivers for the physical needs of the congregation. Their qualifications are also specifically outlined in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. With the early church thus organized, “The word of God kept on spreading; and the number of disciples continued to increase... becoming obedient to the word” (Acts 6:7, NASB). This is our leadership vision for moving forward in accomplishing our mission of continually growing faithful followers of Christ.