

## Proposal for Elder-led Leadership for Orchard Community Church:

The Leadership Board and Deacons propose transitioning to an elder-led leadership structure for Orchard Community Church.



**Reason for Proposal:** We believe the evidence of the New Testament strongly points to early churches being led by a group of elders. The greatest task for leadership in churches is not administration, coordination or management. It is the teaching and shepherding of the local church according to the Word of God. This is the role of elders. Having a plurality of spiritually mature leaders in the church keeps the leaders accountable to each other, protects the church from being limited by one person's strengths and weaknesses, and guards the church from being directed by the opinions of spiritually immature people.

- 1. Role and Function of Elders:** Elders are spiritually mature men who serve as shepherd-leaders to oversee, instruct, and care for the local church according to the Word of God.
  - A. Elders lead the church [1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:1-2] by teaching and preaching the Word of God [1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9], protecting from false teachers [Acts 20:17, 28-31]; encouraging and guiding believers in sound doctrine [1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:13-17; Titus 1:9]; visiting the sick and praying for the congregation [James 5:14; Acts 20:35]; and judging doctrinal issues in the church [Acts 15:1-21] (Alexander Strauch, Biblical Eldership, 16). All of this must be done in humility and love for the people of the church and be done according to God's Word.
  - B. All other ministries of the church function under the guidance and authority of the elders since the primary role of the elders is to lead the church according to the Word of God. This puts the study, teaching, and application of the Word of God and the shepherding of the people as the main priorities of the highest level of leadership in the church which leads to greater spiritual maturity among the people of the church. This requires highly qualified men who meet the biblical requirements for eldership.
  - C. The elders are responsible for lovingly and biblically overseeing any necessary discipline process.
  - D. The elders will elect a chairman and vice-chairman from existing elders. The chairman will facilitate the ministry of the elders through communication and by guiding discussion at meetings. He will work closely with the Senior Pastor in this role. The vice-chairman will function in the chairman's role if the chairman is unable.
  - E. All elders (including the Sr. Pastor) are equal in authority.
  - F. The elders will approve all board chairpersons and will approve the annual budget before it is presented to the church members for final approval.
  - G. The elders will choose one of the elders to moderate church business meetings.
  - H. For legal purposes, the elders are the board of directors of the church.
- 2. Qualifications:** The qualifications for an elder are described in a few places in Scripture, but most notably in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Elders must be men who are qualified to be examples of a mature believer. This is seen in being above reproach, providing godly leadership in his own family (if applicable), being knowledgeable of Scripture and capable to apply Scripture to decisions and situations, showing gentleness and hospitality. An elder must not be a new believer, a womanizer, quarrelsome, a lover of money, or be addicted to sinful or controlling substances or behavior.
- 3. Number:** The minimum number of elders (including the Sr. Pastor) is three. The number of elders on staff (pastors) should not be greater than the number of non-staff elders. There is no maximum number of elders and elders should be appointed as God provides qualified men for this ministry, but a general range of 5 to 12 is advisable. If for some reason the number of elders drops to two or less, a temporary board of current church leaders, other local church leaders, the regional NAB minister or some combination thereof will be assembled to guide the church until new elders can be found.
- 4. Oversight and Coordination with Church Boards and Committees:** All other ministries or ministry structures (boards, committees, teams, etc.) operate under the authority and guidance of the elders. The elders should meet monthly with the chairpersons of other church boards for communication, feedback, and to provide spiritual oversight of the ongoing ministries of the church. The church boards are responsible to take the direction given by

the elders and to work in their particular areas of ministry to carry this out. Elders should listen to and work with the boards in order to understand needs and to give direction.

The elders have the authority to start and end ministries or create and remove ministry structures (boards, committees, teams, etc.) as necessary. The elders will approve all new ministries and any significant changes to existing ministries. The elders should also regularly review the ministries of the church and the curriculum being taught to see if they are doctrinally sound and in line with the mission statement and core values.

5. **Elders and Pastoral Staff:** The Senior Pastor is one of the elders, equal in authority, but with specific duties as pertaining to his paid position. The Senior Pastor's elder term is unending as long as he is the Senior Pastor. The decision to include other pastoral staff positions among the elders will be decided by the elders on a case by case basis. The elders will oversee any pastoral search process and must approve of any pastoral candidate before the candidate is voted on by church members.
6. **Terms of Service:** Elders will serve a three year term. At the end of the three year term they may be approved by the members for another three year term. At the end of two consecutive terms, an elder must step down from the elder board for one year. He may be re-nominated the following year after completing an abbreviated elder qualification process. Elders may be removed by the congregation by a 3/4 vote at an appropriately called business meeting.
7. **Frequency of Meetings:** Elders will meet no less than twice per month (and more often if possible). Elder meetings will consist of time in bible study, study of helpful reference material, prayer to seek God's guidance on issues in the church, discussion of particular issues in the church in order to give direction to ministry leaders, and time discussing and praying for the spiritual maturity of individual members. The elders will meet monthly with board chairpersons in order to give direction and receive feedback.
8. **Candidate Approval Process:** Elders will select candidates to enter the elder qualification process. They should seek input from people in the church in this selection process. The elder qualification process will seek to discern if a man is qualified to be an elder and will provide training so that, if approved, the candidate will be prepared for service. This elder qualification process will be approved by the elders and communicated to the church. The Senior Pastor and, if possible, a few current elders will meet regularly with a candidate to discuss topics of the nature of the church, overview of Scripture, and a biblical understanding of eldership. At the end of this process, the elders will interview the candidate and decide whether or not to nominate the candidate. The elders will publish their elder nominees to the church and seek feedback for four weeks (28 days). Then the church members will vote by ballot for individual elder candidates. Approval will require a 2/3 majority.
9. **Church Member Authority:** Church members have the final authority on confirming elder candidates, removing an elder, approving the annual budget, hiring pastoral staff, approving constitutional changes, and approving changes to the doctrinal statement.

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#### **Transition Plan to New Leadership Structure:**

We propose operating under our existing leadership until at least 3 elders are selected in addition to the Sr. Pastor. Upon the approval of these elders by the church members, the church will functionally change to an elder-led leadership structure under the specifics of the elder leadership proposal for the term of one year. During that year, the elders should oversee a constitutional change committee to propose changes to the constitution to reflect this new leadership structure and be approved by the members. The goal is to transition to elder leadership in Fall 2014 and to change the constitution in Fall of 2015.