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# The Church: Structure & Servants

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A Proposal to Add Elders & a Women's Team  
to the Leadership Structure of Hope Community Church

PRESENTED BY  
PASTOR KRIS MCGEE AND THE ELDER ADVISORY TEAM  
February 4, 2024

# Executive Summary

The Elder Advisory Team and Pastor Kris worked to develop the following proposal of an expanded leadership structure for Hope Community Church. After an extended season of examining the Scriptures, evaluating our current structure, and praying for wisdom, we recommend the following changes:

1. The addition of male elders to our current leadership structure.
2. The addition of a women's leadership team to our current leadership structure.

This document will give details regarding the what, why, and how we envision this coming to life at Hope Community Church. In addition, we recommend that the church remain "congregational" in our authority structure as outlined in our current bylaws.

Two weeks prior to the March 3, 2024, Members' Meeting, where we will vote on this proposal, church members will receive exact wording for amended bylaw changes that reflect these recommendations. There will be a meeting over Zoom on February 22, 2024 at 8:00pm to make space for any final discussion or questions. If you have questions but are unable to attend or would like to have a discussion in a different setting, please reach out to Pastor Kris or someone on the Elder Advisory Team.

## Introduction From Pastor Kris & The Elder Advisory Team

We believe the Bible is very clear that Jesus is the head of the church. He rules over all things. We also believe that the Bible provides flexibility for how a church expresses the specific details of its leadership structure. These two realities gave us a basis for both courage and humility during this season of discernment. As you will read, we believe adding elders and a women's leadership team will help us better accomplish our mission and vision. We also believe that adding both a male and a female team will help us to more robustly express God's design for leadership that we find in the Scriptures. Therefore, we are eager to present a framework with further definition and explanation for our church to prayerfully consider.

We have not simply adopted a model from somewhere else, but have sought to take into account our story as a church, our current situation and leadership culture, and our desires for the future. In our research and discernment process we have learned from many in our own denomination as well as from others with diverse backgrounds and traditions while seeking to stay true to who we are as an autonomous local church with a particular set of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and history. This resulted in a custom and somewhat unique proposal. Thus, for the sake of clarity, there is a lexicon towards the beginning of the document where we define key terms that you will see throughout the document.

In addition to this document we have created a number of [videos](#). They are organized by questions and topics that we hope will give further vision and explanation.

We are asking the church to process this information, pray for discernment, reach out with any questions, and then vote on the proposal at our next Members' Meeting on March 3, 2024. Thank you for your prayerful consideration. We welcome your feedback and questions.

Blessings,

Pastor Kris McGee

Jimmy Dodd, Carol Ann Sykes, Rob Overton, Adrienne McGee, Ali Thomas & Joel Dykstra

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# Why Add Elders & a Women's Leadership Team?

## Answering the Biggest Question on Everyone's Mind

by Pastor Kris

God the Father loves His Church! Jesus gave his life to save her. The Holy Spirit has given gifts to his people so that the church might be built up and mature in unity and love (Eph. 4:4-16). And one day the church will be presented as the Bride of Christ in glorious perfection, without spot or wrinkle (Rev. 19:6-10, Eph. 5:25-33). It is God's love for his Bride and commitment to her that motivates us to want to reflect his heart for the Church.

Second to God's heart for his Church, faithfulness to the Scriptures is driving my desire to add elders and a women's leadership team to our current structure. I want to say that without saying or implying that our current leadership structure is "unbiblical." However, I think we can pursue something that could more robustly reflect what we see in the Bible. As we examine the Scriptures it seems clear that God seeks to care for his church by establishing roles and giving spiritual gifts to his people so they might flourish and reflect His glory (1 Tim. 3:1-11, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Cor. 12-14). The biblical example and expectation seems to be that the church is led by a plurality of elders (often called overseers) who are appointed and recognized in each church (Acts 14:23, Acts 20:28-35, 1 Tim. 5:17, Titus 1:5, 1 Pet. 5:1-5). These elders are designed to partner with the deacons of a church to serve and care for the community together (1 Tim. 3:1-11, Acts 6:1-7). I see our paid staff (who are a remarkable group of men and women) as straddling the line between the oversight function of an elder and the service function of a deacon. Our staff is afforded the ability to focus time and attention on planning and equipping and helping to implement our vision. In so many ways they lead and serve our church with a deep love for God and for all of you. You won't find a direct reference of a "church staff" in the Bible, as it is a fairly modern luxury, but we are grateful our church can benefit from their gifts and efforts.

Another motivation I have is to live into God's plan for the church to benefit from both male and female leadership. I am really excited about what could be as we both clarify God's design for gendered leadership and elevate our understanding of the role and value of women in the church. Throughout history the church has not always reflected the roles of men and women well. In fact, there is a lot of pain and confusion around this, but I am hopeful that with God's help we can design a framework that would allow Hope Community Church to better reflect God's good design in ways that will be empowering, freeing, healthy, and beautiful (Gen. 1:26-27, 2:18, Titus 2:1-6).

I also believe adding elders to our leadership structure would provide many practical benefits—three in particular stand out:

1. Increased capacity to care for, lead, and shepherd the church as we multiply and raise up spiritual leaders from within our body. Essentially, the Elders would multiply the Lead Pastor's role so we can more deeply shepherd our people.
2. Increased continuity during major church transitions or events as the nucleus of the leadership, oversight, shepherding, and vision would be shared by non-staff leaders

who would be able to carry out the vision of the church during seasons of change among our staff.

3. Increased accountability and support for staff leadership, which would help to ensure the health of our team.

I love what is happening in the life of our church in this season. It has been challenging and even joyfully chaotic at times, but God is at work bringing new life both spiritually and physically to our church family. While I don't have a desire to control what God is doing at Hope, I do feel a burden to steward and care for our church. I am thinking not just about today but about what will lead toward our health and maturity decades from now. Asking how we can foster long-term health, accountability, and love motivates me to want to make this change now, in a proactive way, rather than wait until we feel stretched too thin, outgrow our current structure, deal with burnout, or face a significant leadership challenge.

At the end of the day I believe we will be healthier as a church and I will be healthier as your Lead Pastor if we can add a plurality of lay elders and a complementing team of women leaders to our current leadership structure. That said, I don't think health is the highest good—God's glory is! However, we will struggle to live for God's glory consistently if we are unhealthy. To say that another way, implementing a leadership structure is not the goal ... rather it is a means to the end of glorifying God by living out our mission to proclaim hope, pursue transformation, and push back darkness.

Therefore, I believe we will be healthier in the long run and better reflect the framework we find in Scripture if we add elders and a complementing women's team to our existing church leadership structure. This is the "why" behind this whole thing!!

# Lexicon

One of the challenges in establishing a church model is the diverse ways that people from different traditions or denominations use words. There is often not an agreed upon definition as different people use the same words in different ways to mean different things. This can create confusion both for people who are new to the Christian faith and for those who are considering a change after many years of church involvement. Therefore, it seemed helpful to provide an initial definition and explanation of key words and concepts to help communicate what we mean throughout this document.

## Ezer

The vision and name for our women's leadership team comes from the concept of the Hebrew word *Ezer*—the Hebrew word meaning “helper” or “ally.”

Sadly, our modern ideas of “helper” are not strong enough to capture the original meaning behind the word Ezer. We are helped in our understanding when we realize that the vast majority of the time Ezer is used in the Bible it speaks of God as the one who is our helper. The word Ezer is found 21 times in the Bible. Two of them are in the creation account in Genesis 2 to speak of Eve, two times it is a reference to other nations that God's people looked to for aid, and the other 16 times are references to God as our helper. For example:

“The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh.” – Exodus 18:4

“Our soul waits for the LORD; he is our help and our shield.” – Psalm 33:20

“I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” – Psalm 121:1-2

To call God “our helper” is to say that He is the one who is needed and essential, and we are dependent and lacking ... not the other way around. This helps frame how we understand the value and benefit of a women's team in the life of our church where we desire to have a healthy expression of women and men partnering together.

## Preaching

We will use the word “preaching” most often to refer to the primary communication of God's Word during the Sunday morning service. Some make a distinction between preaching and teaching by saying one is aimed at the heart (preaching) and one is aimed at the head (teaching). While we appreciate the effort being made with that distinction it seems to push a binary that we don't think is ultimately helpful. We believe preaching and teaching should both be aimed at the heart and the mind. They both should seek to inform as well as stir our affections and they both should make application to real life. When 2 Timothy 4:2 gives

instruction to “Preach the word,” the verse goes on to say “reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” Here we see that preaching includes several elements of communication including teaching. Therefore, we want to define preaching as distinct from teaching primarily due to *where* and *when* it happens, rather than specific content, style, or aim.

## Teaching

Teaching is the communication of God’s truth to others. Both men and women are told in Colossians 3:16 to “teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.” Romans 12:7 names teaching among other spiritual gifts, all of which are given to both men and women.

Teaching is a crucial part of carrying out the Great Commission where Jesus says to go and make disciples, baptizing them and “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20).

The ability to teach is also one of the qualifications of being an elder (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:9). Elders bear a unique responsibility to oversee the communication of and guarding of the doctrine found in the Scriptures in keeping with orthodox faith (Acts 20:26-32, Titus 1:9-16). We believe this is the authoritative teaching that is reserved for men in 1 Timothy 2:12. We see a variety of types of teaching in the Scriptures. This means it is appropriate for others to teach the congregation in ways that exhort, explain, illustrate, and encourage in line with the established doctrine. The Elders fulfill their responsibility by approving and supporting others who teach. We believe it is appropriate for women to teach in the congregation in ways that align with Scripture under the elders’ authority and direction for the church.

So, we see that teaching is named as a spiritual gift and something that should be done by all Christians. And then as part of the role of overseer, the Scriptures give specific authority to elders to teach and guard orthodox doctrine as they lead the church that God has called them to shepherd.

## Authority

Authority refers to the responsibility to make decisions as well as to lead and direct others. In our current cultural moment it is difficult to think about authority without fear, suspicion, or anxiety as we face the fallout of abuses of power ... in the world, in the church, and in our personal lives. However, in God’s kingdom the vision of power and authority is very different. Jesus defines a redemptive use of authority when he says,

“You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

- Mark 10:42-45



This upside-down understanding of authority shapes how we believe leaders are to exercise authority at Hope Community Church. While Christians share many of the same responsibilities, the Elders bear the unique responsibility to lead and oversee the vision, direction, and the teaching of the church. God has given the leaders of His church a certain amount of authority to help cultivate flourishing. This is why God tells His people in Hebrews 13:17, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

There is also a mutuality between the Elders and the church when it comes to authority. Some have called this the difference between the [authority of counsel and the authority of command](#).<sup>1</sup> The Elders are asked to lead and direct the congregation as they understand the final earthly authority of the church rests with the members of the congregation.

It is helpful to remember that all of the authority comes from King Jesus (Matt. 28:18). This means, as Dr. Diane Langberg has said, that *all* power is derivative. The power that is inherent in one’s position, gifting, knowledge, verbal ability, or spiritual authority has one source—*all power comes from Christ*. In Matthew 28:18, Jesus said, “All power is given to me in heaven and on earth...” It is not ours; it is His and is to be used in accord with His word and His character.

By God’s grace we will seek to neither abdicate authority nor abuse it.

## Submission

Submission is the call of all Christians to lay down their rights and preferences for the sake and benefit of others. This mutual submission can be expressed in diverse ways. We see an example of this in Ephesians 5:21-33 where both husbands and wives are told to “submit to one another out of reverence to Christ.” Therefore, as a Christian virtue, we see that a wife is called to submit to her husband the way the church submits to Jesus and the husband’s submission to his wife is patterned after Jesus, as he lays down his very life for her (a willingness to die for the sake of another seems pretty submissive!). This is a call to real submission, and yet, there is some difference or asymmetry in the examples and instruction. We believe there can be mutuality and equality while living into distinct and diverse roles and responsibilities. Therefore, the church is called to submit to her leaders (Heb. 13:17) and the leaders lay down their lives for the people under their care.

## Pastor, Elder, and Overseer

The New Testament uses three different words to describe the same leadership role. These are **elder** (*presbuteros*), **overseer**<sup>2</sup> (*episcopos*), and **pastor** (*poimen*—where we get the word

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<sup>1</sup> See an article titled “How do elders relate to the authority of the congregation?” at <https://www.9marks.org/answer/how-do-elders-relate-authority-congregation/>

<sup>2</sup> *Episcopos* can also be translated as “bishop”. You will often find it translated this way in older translations like the King James Version and the Revised Standard Version. See 1 Timothy 3:1-2 in those translations.

“shepherd”). While each of these words have different nuanced meanings we see them used interchangeably to describe different functions of the same role. Here are some examples:

“So I exhort the elders (*presbuteros*) 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 (*poimnion*—the verb form of the word for ‘pastor’ or ‘shepherd,’ cf. Eph 4:11) the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, (*episkopeō*—the verb form of ‘oversee’) 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 Peter 5:1–3

“Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called the elders (*presbuteros*) of the church to come to him.” – Acts 20:17

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episcopos*), to care (*poimainein*—another verb form of ‘shepherd/care’) for the church of God.” – Acts 20:28

“This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders (*presbuterou*) in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believer and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer (*episcopos*), 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 ...” – Titus 1:5–7

Therefore, since these words are used interchangeably throughout the Bible we will use the words “elder” and “pastor” to describe essentially the same overseer role in the church. However, because words are used in such diverse ways in our culture, we will use the term “elder” to describe a man serving in the overseer role who is not a paid staff member, and we will use the term “pastor” to refer to a man serving in the overseer role who is a paid staff member. So, you may hear someone introduce themselves as “one of the Elders” or “one of the Pastors,” but you should understand them to both be exercising oversight (1 Pet. 5:2)—one in a lay role and another in a paid role.

## Associate Pastor

The title Associate Pastor refers to a man ordained as a pastor who serves the church in a staff capacity under the direction of the Lead Pastor.

## “First Among Equals”<sup>3</sup>

This phrase is often used to describe the unique role of the Lead Pastor among the other Elders. The Lead Pastor is afforded by the church full-time vocational capacity and, therefore, will always give more time and attention to leading and shepherding the church than a bi-vocational elder will have the ability to do. Because the Lead Pastor will often have more information, insight, context, and training/experience, the other Elders recognize the Lead Pastor's role, seek to follow his lead, and defer to him when appropriate. There is also a higher level of daily responsibility that is appropriate to the nature of the Lead Pastor's full-time job. This does not make the Lead Pastor superior in any way—he only gets one vote like everyone else, but his words do carry a unique weight given his role. (The phrase “first among equals” is not Pastor Kris's favorite, but it is a common phrase so we will try to benefit from it.)

## Complementing

God has beautifully and brilliantly designed His church with diverse gifts and roles (illustrated by different body parts in 1 Cor. 12). This diversity is also true when it comes to men and women, where we see differences but still a shared equality, dignity, value, and worth. We believe that the differences between men and women are not evidence of inequality but rather are meant to help, complement, and benefit the other. When the two genders are functioning in their God-designed ways, they complement one another. This complementarity is part of God's intention for human flourishing; therefore, the Elders and the Ezer Team seek to joyfully complement one another in their roles as spiritual leaders.

## Deacon

The word “deacon” comes from the Greek word meaning “servant” (*diakonos*). We see the qualifications of the office of deacon in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and we see in Acts 6 the first prototype deacons who are commissioned to care for the widows in the community. Deacons are recognized spiritual leaders who serve the church in practical (often physical) ways. At our church, we have traditionally used the word to speak of men and women who have been nominated and ordained by the church for the specific task of providing care for our members. This has expressed itself in different strategies throughout the history of our church, but consistently our Deacons have focused on serving and caring for our members—especially for our homebound members, the elderly, the sick, and those in financial need.

When we are referring to Hope Community's traditional role and office of ordained Deacons of member care we will try to use a capital “D” (i.e. each member is assigned to a Deacon). See the next section for more explanation.

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<sup>3</sup> You can read more about this phrase/concept in Jonathan Leeman's article *What Does “First Among Equals” Mean on an Elder Board?*  
<https://www.9marks.org/article/what-does-first-among-equals-mean-on-an-elder-board/>

See this video on [elders and deacons](#) for more information on how the role of elders and deacons serve together in distinct ways.

## “Deacon Roles”

Because the word “deacon” simply means “servant,” we will use the term “deacon role” to describe recognized leaders who serve in official capacities to carry out a variety of practical expressions of our church’s vision. An example of this would be our different Ministry Teams (i.e. Finance, Personnel, Property, Hospitality, Outward Facing Ministries, etc.). Men and women on these teams serve our church in official and practical ways as they do things like anticipate and respond to needs related to our building, ensure that important policies related to finances or staffing are carried out thoughtfully and with wisdom, and work behind the scenes to host events and meals for the church and community. These teams also help to develop ministry plans and establish budgets each year. In addition, the chairs of these teams are nominated and approved by a vote from the congregation. While it is true that all Christians are called to serve, you can see how these roles provide a unique level of care and service to our church that has a more official capacity. Therefore, identifying them as a deacon role seems appropriate.

## Ordination

Ordination speaks of the official affirmation or commissioning of a spiritual leader. We see this expressed in the Bible when the community “lays hands” on someone to recognize and deploy them for a special task (Acts 6:6, Acts 13:1-3, 1 Tim. 4:14). There is usually a season of evaluation and examination of the individual as part of the ordination process.

The word “ordination” is not in the Scriptures nor are there biblical guidelines given for what is involved in ordination. Therefore, each church community has the flexibility and responsibility to define their own requirements and parameters for ordination.

We currently ordain our Deacons. Given the responsibility of the Ezer Team, we recommend that they also be ordained as deacons. In addition, we recommend that Elders be ordained.

Because of what is required for the different roles, the process and substance of the evaluation and examination will be different for each role. (While not part of this proposal, it may be helpful in the future to use different words to distinguish between the different types or levels of ordination.)

The church also has the joyful responsibility and ability to ordain vocational pastors. Because our elders would be seen as pastors in our church the process and qualifications for ordination of a staff and a non-staff pastor/elder will be similar.

The church also has the ability to license someone for ministry. This is seen as an initial yet significant affirmation by the church of someone’s vocational ministry calling. Many of our paid staff can and should be licensed. Traditionally someone called to vocational ministry is licensed before they are ordained.

## Minister

Minister is a designation for a staff member who has shepherding, teaching, and/or oversight responsibilities in their area of ministry, but they are not officially ordained. This will be the preferred title for women in these roles as well as non-ordained men.

## Executive Session

Most of our elder, leadership, and staff meetings are open to members who would like to attend to observe, share updates, or address concerns. We believe this “open door policy” cultivates trust and transparency. However, for the protection and dignity of our members, there are times this open door policy can't be maintained. Due to the confidential nature of situations like sensitive pastoral care issues or church discipline, there will be times that our elders need to “close the door” and have a private portion of their meetings. This is commonly known as an “executive session” and would usually happen towards the end of a meeting.

## Elder Role Description

**“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. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.” - 1 Peter 5:1-4**

In a word, the role of an elder can simply be defined as “shepherd.” Taking cues from 1 Peter 5, the idea of shepherding gives elders a framework and vision as they think about what they are called to do.

The idea of shepherding has a deep history and represents powerful imagery in the Old and New Testament, which unfortunately has largely been lost in our modern world. Shepherds were not regarded as a noble profession, quite the opposite. Shepherds were poor men who wandered the wilderness in search of areas to water and graze their flocks. It is significant then that God calls David, a shepherd, to become the king of Israel and that some of the first people to witness Jesus’s birth were shepherds. The call of elders to shepherd, then, is a call to humble leadership. While shepherds were not looked upon highly by society, they were of immense importance for their sheep. Sheep need a shepherd and will not survive without one. Sheep face constant dangers, whether it be simply getting lost from wandering off or threats from predators. Sheep embody dependence and a sense of helplessness. It is significant and radical that Jesus describes His followers as sheep with Him being the Chief Shepherd. Though we may not like the thought, we are helpless without Jesus. By way of analogy, the elders, then, occupy an important role of shepherding the “sheep” of the congregation. It is important as we think about the role of an elder as a shepherd to remember that they are also sheep and members of the local church. This means that while a church should honor their elders, they are not to be seen as superior or in an elite class or rank. Elders lead as equal members of the congregation. In fact, many of the roles and functions of an elder are shared, at least in part, by the other members of the local church. Given that elders are sheep themselves, the importance of having qualified “sheep” serve as elders is of utmost importance.

From the passage in 1 Peter, this shepherding is embodied within two main summary categories: “exercising oversight” and “being examples.” Peter quickly qualifies the “exercising oversight” quality. This commentary helps us understand that proper oversight is a huge blessing, but can all too easily become dangerous. Therefore, oversight must be used with care and love. As we look beyond this passage and pair it with other Scripture, these two categories become further clarified. Below is a list of the key roles and functions that explain how these should be expressed. Under these two broad categories we see throughout

Scripture that an elder is called to “shepherd the flock of God that is among them” as they: **model, teach, lead, protect,** and **care** for God’s church.

## Be Examples to the Flock of God Through Modeling

The more straightforward of the two categories, Jesus calls elders to be examples and to model for the church what apprenticing Jesus looks like (1 Pet. 5:3).

### Model

This call to be an example makes sense of many of the qualifications of an elder as they are relational realities. Furthermore, this is why elders are told to pay careful attention to their own lives as well as the lives of God’s people (Acts 20:28). As elders lead, they are sharing their own selves as well as the Gospel (1 Tim. 4:16, 1 Thess. 2:8). This modeling will express itself in many ways, such as hospitality (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:8), love (1 Cor. 13), and care—the same kind of care a parent gives to their children (1 Thess. 2:7, 11). With humility, elders echo the Apostle Paul when he said, “Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

## Exercising Oversight Through Teaching, Leading, Protecting, & Caring

While it is not easy to encapsulate the role of an elder, Hope Community Church finds these four aspects to be a helpful biblical summary to explain the meaning of “exercising oversight” within the elder role.

### Teach

Elders give oversight to the church by leading through and in accordance with the Scriptures. Elders are called to teach God’s Word, hold firmly to sound doctrine, and correct those who contradict it (1 Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:9). This teaching can take place in both public settings, such as classes, training sessions, and from the pulpit on Sunday morning, and in private settings, such as in the home (Acts 20:20). Elders are charged to know and readily apply Scripture to life so that they might care for the church family and constantly point back to the Gospel.

### Lead

God has designed elder oversight to be a gift to the church. The Scriptures make it clear that the purpose of this leadership is to care for the church (Acts 20:28). As elders lead and direct the affairs of the church, love for God and love for neighbor should be at the heart of their actions. As part of this care, elders are charged to pay careful attention to themselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers (Acts 20:28). One of the chief duties of a shepherd is to know the sheep and guide them to green pastures and cool springs that renew and refresh. Elders are charged with guiding the congregation in matters of doctrine and discipline, and providing wisdom in all matters of life, so as to lead the congregation according to the Scriptures (1 Tim. 3:2; 1 Tim. 5:17; Titus 1:9).

### Protect

Shepherds are charged with guarding and protecting the flock from dangers, from drifting away from the Gospel, and from false teachers (Acts 20:28-32, Titus 1:9). Elders, along with all Christians, are told to be sober-minded and watchful because the devil prowls around like a lion seeking to do harm to God’s people (1 Pet. 5:8). Elders are told to keep watch over the

souls of their people and that they will give an account to God for how they lead and protect the flock (Heb. 13:17). Indeed the position of elder calls men to be vigilant and know the present dangers within the culture, the church, and beyond. They are called to search them out so that the sheep that they watch over might not turn astray. This warning, guarding, and protecting has both informal and formal expressions, which include private rebuke and church discipline when necessary (Matt. 18:15-20).

## Care

The Bible describes the church as a family with language of brothers and sisters, and sons and daughters, and calls elders to shepherd the church the same way a loving parent would lead their home (1 Tim. 3:5). This involves nurture and care as well as exhortation and encouragement (1 Thess. 2:7-8, 11-12). An elder applies the call to love as the highest good in overarching ways (1 Cor 13). This includes having affection for the people of God (1 Thess. 2:8), helping the weak (Acts 20:35), and praying for the sick (James 5:14). Love of God and love of neighbor should characterize all elders' actions.

In addition to the description of the role above, it is helpful to note a few realities that contextualize the role of elder within the Bible and within our immediate congregation at Hope Community Church.

- Jesus is the Chief Shepherd of the church. He is the lead pastor. He has final and ultimate authority over every area of His church (1 Pet. 5:4).
- Jesus shepherds His flock through His Word and through the leading of the Holy Spirit. The authority of the elders to shepherd the church comes from the Scriptures, not from within the elders themselves. The elders should only express authority in the church to the degree they are leading in step with the Scriptures as they are guided by the Holy Spirit.
- While there is a unique authority given to the elders by which they serve and direct the church, the final authority—humanly speaking—lies with the members of the church. (This is the functional definition of Congregationalism.)
- Scripture is clear in its call for elder plurality and the importance of the role of deacons in assisting the elders. While elders are called to oversee and lead the congregation, this does not remove the role of women's leadership. Elders lead best when they know the needs of the congregation. As such, Elder leadership at Hope occurs in partnership with the staff, a complementing team of godly women (the Ezer Team), and other leaders who oversee particular ministries in the church (the Leadership Team).
- Prayer is essential to fulfill the role of the elders and should mark every aspect of their shepherding. Both the specific task of praying for God's people and doing everything in a prayerful way demonstrates that they are dependent and desire to be led by God as they lead the church.

## Terms and Duration

Elders will be asked to serve for a three-year term with a maximum of two consecutive terms. However, they will need to be reelected by the church at the end of each term if they have a desire to continue and the church has a need.



# Elder Qualifications

While the Bible gives a robust view of both men and women partnering together in life and ministry, we believe the role of elder/overseer/pastor is reserved for qualified men. For a detailed explanation and vision of this view see the [Appendix](#) or watch the video "[Does The Bible Say Only Men Can Be Elders?](#)," which can be found on our website under Resources.

From Scripture, two key passages speak to the qualifications for elders specifically: 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

“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 Timothy 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 1:5-9

While these passages provide a detailed list of qualifications, these qualifications should not be viewed as exhaustive but rather indicative of the type of people God calls to lead His church—a mature believer in Christ, who is a person of righteousness and worthy of emulation. The detailed qualifications help create this elder portrait and, as such, provide a means of assessing the fitness of someone to become an elder. It should be noted that while these are qualifications for elders, they are traits to which every Christian should aspire.

The characteristics Paul outlines seek to give us a window into the person of the elder candidate by looking at how the candidate reflects God in all areas of his life—inside the church, outside the church, and especially within the home. In looking at these areas, Paul also gives us key characteristic groups to consider where the elder ought to reflect Christ—areas of virtue, specific skills, and areas of human struggle.

As a prerequisite to these detailed qualifications, 1 Timothy 3:1 notes the elder candidate should have an aspiration to the position. This does not exclude the possibility that he is sought out and urged to be an elder, but no pressure should be used that would result in an unwilling, half-hearted service. The office of elder is a serious role that requires sacrifice and, therefore, requires commitment, faithfulness, and men who find joy in serving the church through the office.

## Areas of Virtue

The passages above list the following positive attributes that are to be characteristic of elders: above reproach, husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, lover of good, upright, holy, disciplined, and thought of well by outsiders.

From these characteristics we see key themes that are to be present in an elder's life: righteousness, faithfulness, and wisdom. The following definitions flesh these characteristics out and provide more specifics on how elders are to bear out their responsibilities. The first—above reproach—seemingly defines the overarching characteristic that the others embellish.

1. **Above reproach:** Every elder must be a man of mature character and integrity before God and men so that he is irreproachable and does not give cause for others to think badly of the church, the faith, or the Lord. Certainly, no man is free from every fault, but there is a difference between the battle we all face with sin and a disqualifying indulgence or pattern of sinful actions and reactions that would bring shame to the name of Jesus. Practically this means that elders must be quick to repent, step into the light, and turn away from sin while it is in seed form.
2. **Husband of one wife:** An elder must live a life of purity and integrity. That is what is at the heart of this virtue. We do not see this as a qualification based on marriage status, but rather an insistence that an elder be faithful. With that perspective in mind, a widower, a single person, or an existing elder whose spouse dies can still remain an elder. In addition, because this is naming faithfulness, it leads us to believe that if the Bible gives grounds for divorce and remarriage then those should be applied and taken into consideration when examining someone's qualifications. Whether married or unmarried, the elder must be an example to others of faithfulness and sexual purity.
3. **Sober-minded (vigilant):** He must have a sound mind and wisdom in order to exercise good judgment. An elder must be on-guard and alert just as a shepherd must always be watching for wolves and anything else that might endanger his flock. An elder must be able to discern the times, truth from error, and the needs of the sheep. He must watch carefully over his own life and heart lest there arise any root of bitterness; unbelief; sinful patterns of life, speech, or thought; neglect of the things of God; or disobedience to the commands of Scripture.

4. **Self-controlled/disciplined:** Elders must be able to control their emotions and desires, especially in difficult situations.
5. **Respectable:** This qualification means that an elder must have his life in order. He must adorn his character so that it shines with truth, honesty, justice, purity, loveliness, and virtue. A respectable man is a model of godliness because he keeps God's commandments; he is a man who has wisdom from above and understanding from the precepts of Scripture.
6. **Lover of good:** He loves to be involved in doing good. More than merely doing good, he has a bent and love to see goodness done.
7. **Upright:** He cares about whether people are treated fairly. He wants to see justice in the world at all levels.
8. **Holy:** He is a person of devotion to Christ with a life of prayer and meditation. He loves worship and has a deep personal relationship with the Lord.
9. **Thought well of by outsiders:** It is important that an elder conduct all his daily affairs well so that unbelievers have no occasion to reproach him or the church of Christ. This qualification excludes hypocrites whose daily life contradicts their confession of Christ.

## Specific Skills

The passages also provide four required skills that must characterize an elder: Hospitality, the ability to teach sound doctrine, ability to rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine, and the ability to manage his household well. These skills directly relate to his role in the office of elder as discussed in the defining paragraphs below.

1. **Hospitable:** Christ has given elders to the church for the edification and equipping of the people of God. Elders should be willing and glad to share their gifts with others, especially those under their care. Biblical hospitality is grounded in seeing people as made in the image of God and therefore worthy of dignity. It is also an expression of the Lord's command to do for others what you wish they would do for you (Matthew 7:12). That could mean providing food or lodging, using one's place for meeting, or even making oneself available for visitors or those in need of counsel. All the people of God, and especially the elders, are not to be cold toward strangers and visitors, but warm, gracious, friendly, and kind, endeavoring to meet their needs and in this way show the love and compassion which our Lord Jesus showed when He was on earth, and which He still daily shows in His faithful, gracious provision for all our needs and the needs of all His creatures.
2. **Able to teach/give instruction in sound doctrine:** The elder's role (and all that goes with it) in its very nature involves teaching—specifically the orthodox and historic doctrines of the Christian faith. Teaching is also an essential part of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. Elders must encourage and exhort God's people to believe and live according to the Bible and to warn and convict those who stray of their error. This requires skill in teaching people privately with patience and gentleness. The elders must see to it that the congregation not only hears the public preaching and teaching of God's Word, but also lives in obedience to God's Word. That requires skill in teaching. An elder should be able to give biblical counsel to the people of God in matters of faith and life. He should be able to make decisions at meetings and judge matters according to biblical principles. To be skillful in teaching does not

mean that one is also skillful in preaching. “Apt to preach” is not a qualification given in 1 Timothy 3 or Titus 1 for all elders.

3. **Rebuke those who contradict sound doctrine:** An elder must be able to discern false teachings, whether by his own minister or by others, both inside and outside the church. He must be able to confront them with the truth of God’s Word. He must be able to teach the people how their ideas contradict Scripture.
4. **Manages his household well:** Before a man can be trusted to care for the church of God, he must oversee and lead his own household well, including himself, his family, and his daily affairs. The argument is from the lesser responsibility to the greater responsibility. He who is faithful with a few things will be put in charge of greater things. If he has children, they must respect their dad. They do not have to be perfect, but they should respond to his leadership and correction. While there may be exceptions, if an elder’s children are living in blatant and regular disregard for the instructions of their parents, then there should be a pause in his service, both to explore the situation and to make time for the elder to give attention to his own household. He is a loving and responsible spiritual leader in the home. He respects and tenderly loves his wife, if he is married. Their relationship is openly admirable.

## Areas of Human Struggle

While the elder is called to be blameless, Paul highlights key areas the elder must demonstrate mastery over that would otherwise undermine his ability to serve effectively as an elder.

1. **Not a drunkard:** From this qualification we can infer that an elder should neither be given to or under the control of any food, drink, or drug which has the same kind of effect as alcohol on a man’s speech, conduct, and judgment.
2. **Not violent but gentle:** This means that an elder must be gentle, peaceable, and able to keep his body under control so that no one can say that he is a bully, corrosive, or leading through intimidation. A man who is violent, argumentative, or who gets into physical altercations is not qualified to be an elder.
3. **Not quarrelsome:** An elder must not be argumentative, divisive, or given to quarrels. Rather than continually being disgruntled about something, an overseer should be peaceable, reconciliatory, longsuffering, forbearing, and think more highly of others than of himself.
4. **Not quick tempered:** Elders should not be easily made angry but be characterized by self-control.
5. **Not a lover of money/greedy for gain:** This disqualifies from office a man whose primary goal is to get power, control, authority, honor, prestige, respect, or flattery, rather than to glorify God and edify the church.
6. **Not arrogant:** Elders should not think more highly of themselves than others but be characterized by humility.
7. **Not a recent convert:** Whether young or old, one who is a new Christian should not be an elder. A man’s maturity as a Christian is more important for the office of elder than his age in years. Even outstanding human abilities and learning are not sufficient to qualify a newly converted man for the office of elder.

# Elder Assessment

Elders are indeed called to a high standard so that God and His church may be glorified through their exercise of authority. Assessing whether someone is fit to become an elder is a detailed and comprehensive task as is evidenced by the many qualifications that are required for the office.

Hope Community Church considers elder candidates seriously. As part of the process, the elder candidate must demonstrate his fitness in the areas that Paul outlines, but more importantly he must fit the portrait of a mature believer in Christ, who is a person of righteousness and worthy of emulation.

Each elder candidate will go through an assessment process to make every effort to ensure that those who are presented to the church for a vote are qualified and worthy of this high calling. The elder candidate assessment will address the following areas:

1. Theology and doctrine
2. Family health
3. Finances
4. Relationships with neighbors or co-workers

Elder candidates will be trained and equipped to fulfill the roles of **leading, teaching, protecting, caring, and modeling**. Proactive investment in these men will be good for their own spiritual health and the health of our church.

We seek wisdom and discernment in this assessment and understand that the elder qualifications Paul outlines are not always easily quantifiable with a specific demonstration that is common to everyone, but we recognize that they are observable in each candidate.

For example, one of the qualifications of an elder is to be hospitable. How would you measure someone's hospitality? How much hospitality is enough to qualify someone for the role of elder? Do you measure it with how many nights a week they host or is it more of a disposition on a Sunday? Is it how they share their resources with those in need? And then what about seasons of life? What about if they have young kids or their spouse is in a demanding season with their job—how much hosting is expected in those situations? Hospitality could involve discipling one on one, opening his house to a stranger, hosting a small group, and countless other examples. Scripture is wide and provides many additional examples to draw upon, but nonetheless elders are required to be hospitable. You can see that these things are difficult to measure or quantify through the use of a checklist-type approach and, therefore, require wisdom and discernment and conversation both with the elder candidate and with those close to him.

In summary, these qualifications take different forms in different lives, but are all requirements of elders and are therefore assessed using wisdom and discernment and relying on Scripture as the ultimate source of truth.

# Ezer Team Role Description

(Previously referred to as The Women's Leadership Team)

The Ezer Team is a group of women deacons who provide focused leadership in the spiritual care and discipleship of women within the church and a complementing voice of wisdom and insight to the Elders. They are qualified and trained women who have been selected, empowered, and are held accountable by the members of Hope Community Church.

See the [Lexicon](#) for a definition of the Hebrew word Ezer and a brief explanation of why we chose that word for the name of this team.

## Team Purpose and Origin

As a deacon team, these women serve the church by helping accomplish the vision<sup>4</sup> of the Elders. In the same way that the Property and the Finance Teams have specific roles, so does the Ezer Team. The vision for this team is found in both Titus 2 and Genesis 2 as well as the general narrative of Scripture (see [Appendix](#)). Titus 2 and Genesis 2 help explain the two primary roles of this team: to disciple women and to provide a voice to the Elders.

Titus 2 is a specific call for this team to disciple, invest in, and care for younger women with the goal of helping them apprentice Jesus.

**“[Older women] are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.” - Titus 2:3-5**

In Genesis 2:18-25, God makes woman to be with man, because He said it was not good for man to be alone. If God said that it was not good for man to be alone so He created woman, then we believe the Elders will lead the church better with the help and support of a complementing women's leadership team.

**“It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”  
- Genesis 2:18**

## Team Responsibilities

The Ezer Team is charged with the following specific responsibilities:

### **Provide Additional Care and Discipleship of Women**

- To develop an annual plan focused on the discipleship of women.
- To proactively mentor and disciple women one-on-one and in small groups.

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<sup>4</sup> We believe this vision is not “from the Elders” in the sense that the Elders come up with it or establish it. God has established the vision of His church!! Our church's expression of this vision must always originate with the heart of God, be grounded in the Scriptures, and only then can be stewarded by the Elders.

- To reactively provide care and counseling for women when needed.
- To develop other women leaders in the church.

#### **Provide a Voice of Wisdom and Insight to the Elders**

- To meet regularly with the Elders for prayer and to coordinate care of members with a focus on female members.
- To meet regularly with the Elders for planning, discussion, and feedback related to carrying out the vision and mission of the church with the goal of helping to shape the overall annual plan.
- To provide insight and perspective on the state of the church (i.e. helping the Elders see the needs and opportunities of the church from their perspective).

### **Selection and Qualifications**

As a congregational church, the nomination and final approval of the members of the Ezer Team comes from the members of Hope Community Church. the Elders, existing Ezer Team members, and the staff will oversee a season of assessment, training, and equipping for women who are nominated in an effort to present qualified candidates to the members for a final vote.

The Scriptures give the qualifications for this role in the list of deacon qualifications in 1 Timothy.

“In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, the women<sup>5</sup> are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be faithful to his wife<sup>6</sup> and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.”

- 1 Timothy 3:8-13

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<sup>5</sup> The word used here can be translated to refer to women who are deacons or to deacons' wives. Our church understands the first option as preferable and biblically consistent.

<sup>6</sup> This phrase “faithful to his wife” reflects an idiom (i.e. “a one-woman man”) in the ancient world that means faithfulness and purity. As an idiom, it can be legitimately applied to both men and women as a qualification for sexual integrity for both those who are married and single and specifically monogamy for married men and women. It should not be used to insist that deacons cannot be single or widowed.

Because of the additional responsibilities of this role arising from Titus 2 and Genesis 2, the church requires additional qualifications of this team. Members of this team will be competent to:

- Teach in a manner consistent with the orthodox Christian faith and our church's distinctives as led by the Elders. Teaching will occur in one-on-one discipleship settings and in small groups/classes (Titus 2:3-5).
- Provide basic Gospel-centered counseling (Titus 2:3-5).
- Express leadership gifts in a manner consistent with the biblical descriptions of a leader (Mark 10:35-45; John 13:1-17; Rom. 12:8).
- Provide help in situations that require conflict resolution (Titus 2:3-5).

Therefore, the training and assessment process will aim at developing and growing these competencies so that these women can be equipped, empowered, resourced, and accountable to carry out the responsibilities of this role.

## **Terms and Duration**

Women will be asked to serve for a three-year term with a maximum of two consecutive terms. However, they will need to be reelected by the church at the end of each term if they have a desire to continue and the church has a need.



# Relationship Between Different Leadership Roles

Hope Community Church (HCC) is committed to reflecting the vision of an integrated and interdependent church as seen in 1 Corinthians 12-14, where every member is engaged and valued, different roles and functions are honored and appreciated, and mutuality and appreciation for the diversity of how God designed His body to function is known. The following sections provide definitions of key roles within this structure and seek to illustrate how these different roles function together.

## Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the Sheep & Head of His Body, the Church

He stands above all, is the final authority, and leads and guides His church with His Word, His Spirit, and through the offices and roles within the church that He has established—namely Elders and Deacons.

## Congregation

Hope Community Church is a congregational church. This means that each local church has final earthly authority to govern itself. While HCC is part of the Southern Baptist Convention<sup>7</sup> (SBC), the SBC is not an authoritative structure over HCC.

Church members form the congregation through their commitment to Christ, one another, and a shared vision and mission. A healthy and engaged church body disciplines and raises up good leaders and also holds them accountable.

The members of HCC as a collective hold the authority to:

- Approve and if necessary remove the Lead Pastor
- Approve and if necessary remove full-time ministry staff
- Accept new members and remove members when necessary (i.e. church discipline)
- Nominate, approve, and if necessary remove Elders
- Nominate, approve, and if necessary remove members of the Ezer Team (see below)
- Nominate, approve, and if necessary remove Deacons
- Approve the chairs of recognized ministry teams (Personnel, Finance, Property, Hospitality, Outward Facing Ministry Team, International Missions, Benevolence, etc.)
- Approve all members of the Finance and Personnel teams
- Approve the annual budget
- Approve major financial decisions outside of the approved budget
- Approve acquisition of property
- Approve taking on debt
- Approve doctrinal statement changes
- Approve changes to the constitution and bylaws

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.sbc.net>

Hope Community Church recognizes the importance of voting on Elders, staff, Ezer Team, Deacons, and ministry team chairs. These positions require formal votes as these individuals demand a high level of trust from the congregation as they are empowered to lead and make recommendations/decisions to/for the congregation. In addition, the church members appoint special Task Forces for unique situations. A Task Force has a limited time frame and is focused on resolving/addressing a specific issue/situation (i.e. Covid Task Force, Abuse Prevention and Response, etc.). Task Forces do not require a formal vote by the congregation.

## Elders

The Elders are a group of qualified and elected men who shepherd the church. Elders can be thought of as multiplying the role of the Lead Pastor. Elders are responsible for the direction and vision of the church. Namely, that the church's vision and direction stay focused on Jesus and what He calls the church to be and do. Throughout Scripture, the roles of the elders are described as to **Teach, Lead, Protect, Care, and Model** (1 Tim. 3:1-7, 4:15-16, 5:17; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 20:17-35; 1 Thess. 2:1-16; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-11).

At Hope Community Church, our desire is that the majority of our Elders are not part of the paid staff (i.e. majority are lay Elders). The addition of Elders increases capacity to care for, lead, and shepherd the church. It also increases continuity during major church transitions and increases accountability for staff leadership. The Elders direct the agenda for Leadership Team meetings and Members' Meetings. The Chairman of the Elders could function as the Church Moderator for the Leadership Team meetings and Members' Meetings.

## Lead Pastor

As an Elder, the Lead Pastor is responsible for shepherding the church through directing the vision and the teaching. He is responsible to and held accountable by the Elders to lead the staff and ensure that the care of members is happening. The Lead Pastor serves as a peer and an equal to the other Elders (i.e. he only gets one vote); however, because of the unique responsibility and vocational calling of the Lead Pastor, he is seen as a ["first among equals."](#)

## Staff

The staff is tasked with equipping the congregation to live out the church's mission by developing strategies and stewarding resources to carry out the vision/burdens of the church as led by the Elders (Eph. 4:11-14). HCC affords several men and women the opportunity to dedicate their daily working hours to thinking about what plans and initiatives best express God's mission for the church in a given season.

## Deacons

The Deacons are qualified and elected men and women who serve the church through the execution of the church's ministry. They focus on developing and executing practical strategies to help accomplish the church's initiatives. 1 Timothy 3 and Acts 6 give us a vision of elders and deacons as two distinct groups that work together to serve the church. The primary expression of our ordained Deacon ministry is relational care.

## Ezer Team

The Ezer Team is a team of deacon-qualified and elected women. The Ezer Team is responsible for the spiritual care and discipleship of women within the church and to serve as a voice to the Elders by providing both wisdom and insight as the Elders lead and make decisions. The creation of this team is motivated by the creation account where God said that it was not good for man to be alone, so He created woman. In the same way, we believe the Elders lead the church better with the help and support of a complementing women's leadership team (Gen 2:18-25; Titus 2:3-5). *This team would likely replace the current "Women's Discipleship Team."*

## Ministry Teams (Property Team, Finance Team, Personnel Team, Hospitality Team, etc.)

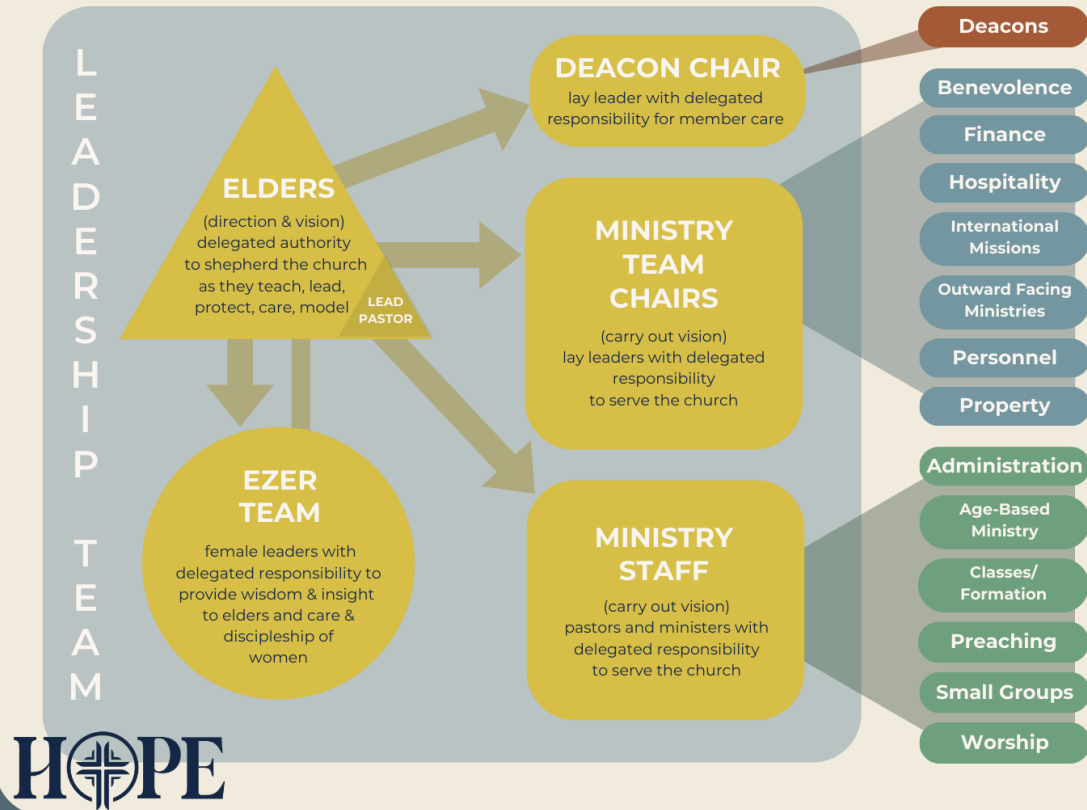
These teams function in a deacon-type capacity as they serve the church by implementing strategies to help express our church's vision and mission in practical ways. This is accomplished as the different teams develop annual ministry plans, create budgets, and respond to needs that arise during the year. While not officially ordained as Deacons, each team leader should meet the qualifications of a deacon as outlined in 1 Timothy 3:8-13 and be affirmed by the church members through a vote.

## Leadership Team

The Leadership Team meets regularly to help coordinate the ministries of the church. The team is comprised of the ministry staff, the chairs of all the recognized ministry teams, the chair of the Deacons, the remaining officers of the church (i.e. the Treasurer, Moderator, Clerk), the Elders, and the Ezer Team. The Elders lead this team in an effort to direct and coordinate the various aspects of HCC's ministry.

# JESUS: ULTIMATE AUTHORITY

## CONGREGATION: RULING EARTHLY AUTHORITY



# Proposed Leadership Meeting Vision/Schedule

## Non-Staff

To help further explain how the different roles and components of our leadership structure would relate to one another, we have included a proposed meeting schedule. You will see that all of the teams would meet together quarterly to help with communication and collaboration. You will also notice that our desire is that the Elder and Ezer Teams would meet together regularly.

## Elders

Two meetings per month:

1. One meeting happens on an evening and is focused on the leadership and oversight of the church. Often others join this meeting for insight, coordination, and camaraderie. This meeting would be replaced by the quarterly Leadership Team Meeting in months when the larger Leadership Team meets (see below). In addition, at least once a quarter the Ezer Team would join the Elders for deeper discussion, planning, and prayer. This would have more of a “board” feel to it. Staff and lay leaders would be invited to discuss specific topics and to give reports. Anyone in the church would be welcome to attend under the “view, voice, vote framework.” For example, anyone can come to the Elders’ meeting to view/listen, some will be invited to participate in the discussion (voice/share/speak/report/etc.), and some will have a vote on decisions. The Elders may choose to go into an [Executive Session](#) when they discern that is most helpful.
2. The other monthly meeting would likely happen in the morning before work and is focused on prayer, soul care, and spiritual friendship/partnership among the Elders. This is most often only the Elders, but people would be invited to come to the end of the meeting for prayer and to have the Elders lay hands on them.

In addition we will plan an annual Elder/Ezer retreat. This will provide additional space for prayer, discernment, and planning. This retreat would kick off the ministry planning process each year. The goal would be to end the retreat with burdens and goals that the Elders can present to the staff and the rest of the Leadership Team. There would also be a training element. This could replace the morning meeting that month.

In addition, each Elder would also be expected to meet with individuals and/or couples for discipleship and care.

## Ezer Team

One regular meeting per month. There could be three different types of meetings:

- Ezers meet by themselves (may begin with time of prayer with Elders and then each go to their distinct meetings)
- Ezers meet with the Elders at one of the evening Elder’s meetings
- Ezers present at the larger quarterly Leadership Team meeting

These meetings can rotate so that four times a year the Ezer Team meets by themselves, four times they meet with the Elders, and four times a year they meet as part of the larger Leadership Team.

In addition, the Ezers would attend the Elder/Ezer retreat, meet with women one-on-one, and have additional meetings if they need more time to plan or respond to a need.

## Leadership Team

Once a quarter, the Leadership Team would meet. Currently the team is comprised of the staff, the chairs of all the recognized ministry teams, chair of the Deacons, and remaining officers of the church (i.e. the Treasurer, Moderator, Clerk). The Elders and Ezer Team would also join this team once they are installed. The primary focus of this team is communication and coordination, which would result in deciding what gets brought to the church members for discussion or vote.

## Ministry Teams (Property Team, Finance Team, Personnel Team, Hospitality Team, etc.)

Each team should meet as needed. Generally this will be once or twice a quarter to ensure individual team members are being informed, deployed, and involved. The discussion and decisions that happen in the quarterly Leadership Team should be communicated to the teams by the team chairs. Some teams like Finance may meet more often, whereas Hospitality may meet less frequently. The goal is to guard the team leader's time and energy so that they are not overburdened or distracted from the responsibilities of their team.

## Deacons

Our Deacons function like a ministry team in that the Deacon chair serves on the larger Leadership Team to ensure communication and coordination across the body and then updates the rest of the Deacons. The goal of this cascading communication is to free the Deacons to serve and care for our people (i.e. less time in meetings and more time with our people). Currently our Deacons meet every other month.

We are restructuring our Deacon model where members will be organized based on geographical quadrants. Ideally each quadrant would be led by at least two Deacons and one lay Elder. This would allow us to follow terms and still maintain some continuity of care. For example, when a Deacon rotated off, the people would still be known by the rest of the leaders overseeing that group, and we can add new Deacons to the group based on rotation and size. If we acknowledge that each person needs a different level of care then Deacons can focus more on homebound members than they do on members who are active in a small group, for example. Our members would still receive a proactive touchpoint coming to them from a Deacon, but they would also be empowered to reach out to their quadrant Deacons and Elders if they had a need, wanted prayer, etc. This would also create another way for member-to-member care or some fellowship opportunities where the quadrant was able to interact with and take ownership for each other.

## Leadership Meeting Chart

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
Congregation: 4 meetings per year											
		Member's Meeting			Member's Meeting			Member's Meeting			Member's Meeting
Elders: 24 meetings per year											
Elder Retreat	Quarterly Leadership Team	Elders & Ezer Team	Elders (after praying with Ezer Team)	Quarterly Leadership Team	Elders & Ezer Team	Elders (after praying with Ezer Team)	Quarterly Leadership Team	Elders & Ezer Team	Elders (after praying with Ezer Team)	Quarterly Leadership Team	Elders & Ezer Team
Elder AM	Elder AM	Elder AM	Elder AM	Elder AM	Elder AM	Elder AM	Elder AM	Elder AM	Elder AM	Elder AM	Elder AM
Ezer Team: 12 meetings per year											
Ezer Team Retreat	Quarterly Leadership Team	Elders & Ezer Team	Ezer Team (after praying with Elders)	Quarterly Leadership Team	Elders & Ezer Team	Ezer Team (after praying with Elders)	Quarterly Leadership Team	Elders & Ezer Team	Ezer Team (after praying with Elders)	Quarterly Leadership Team	Elders & Ezer Team
Team Leaders/Deacon Chair: 8-12 meetings per year											
If Needed	Quarterly Leadership Team	Meet with their team to cascade	If Needed	Quarterly Leadership Team	Meet with their team to cascade	If Needed	Quarterly Leadership Team	Meet with their team to cascade	If Needed	Quarterly Leadership Team	Meet with their team to cascade
Ministry Teams / Deacons: 4-8 meetings per year											
If needed		Team Meeting	If needed		Team Meeting	If needed		Team Meeting	If needed		Team meeting

- June Member's Meeting is where the church votes on budget and any nominations for Ministry Team Chairs, Deacons, Ezer Team, or Elders that need affirmation or reaffirmation based on terms.
- Evening "Elder's Meetings" would rarely be just the Elders.
- Elders would meet alone once a month in the morning for prayer, accountability, and soul care.
- The Elder/Ezer Team retreat in January would take the place of the regular evening meeting.

## FAQs

### What is the timeline for the church to vote on this proposal?

- This proposal will be presented in the December 3, 2023, Members' Meeting.
- We will take several months for prayer, discernment, and questions. This will involve at least one public Q&A Session and any individual or small group meetings that our members request.
- Any changes to the proposal or structure based on feedback from our members will be made and given to the members in writing one month prior to the Members' Meeting on March 3, 2024.
- If it seems like there is significant unity among our members, then we will ask for the church to vote on the proposal at the Members' Meeting on March 3, 2024.
- If the vote passes with a significant majority then we will ask for nominations for both the Elder and Ezer Teams at the March meeting.
- We would then take the next nine months to assess and train the candidates with hopes to bring them to the church for a vote at the 2024 December Members' Meeting.
- Ideally Elders and Ezers would formally begin in their roles starting January 2025.

### How does someone get nominated and what is the process to become an Elder or Ezer?

The process would be something like:

- 1) Individuals would be nominated by a church member at a Members' Meeting.
- 2) The staff and existing recognized leaders would sort through the list to make sure anyone nominated meets the qualifications and to see if there is a known reason why the person shouldn't be an Elder or Ezer candidate. If it is determined that someone should not go forward, then staff will have a private conversation to encourage the person, but voice the concerns and express our desire to give them more time for maturity and/or development before they step towards the candidate process.
- 3) Invite remaining nominees into a training/discernment process and give them time to pray and discern if they want to go forward.
- 4) Inform the congregation of Elder and Ezer candidates who wish to go forward with the development/assessment process—i.e. publicly present them as candidates at a Member's Meeting or on a Sunday.  

This will help both in the discernment process to surface if there are broader concerns that the staff are unaware of and it will help to expose the candidates to our people to raise awareness as they start to experience more of their leadership—i.e. we would have candidates start to lead publicly so our people can get a sense of who they are.
- 5) Six to nine months of development, assessment, and on-the-job training. It is possible that several people opt out during this process or the church leadership may decide the individual needs more time.
- 6) Bring a final list of candidates to the church one month before voting on them.



- 7) Create several public spaces for people to hear testimony, ask questions, and get to know candidates. This should also include actually leading our people. The congregation should understand this to be one of the final steps in the process and an important step of discernment.
- 8) Final discussion and congregational vote to affirm.

## How will the Elders and Ezers be trained?

We will train both the Elders and the Ezer Team based on their role descriptions. Meaning, we will spend the time ensuring they are equipped for the role the church is asking them to do. We don't have all the details yet, but we imagine a monthly meeting with reading and case study type assignments. We would provide training in baseline systematic theology, Bible overview, counseling methods, emotional health/awareness, and conflict resolution. They would also shadow existing leaders to give practical spaces for development and evaluation. See the [Elder Assessment Section](#) for more information.

## Will there be terms for the Elders and Ezers?

Yes. They will be asked to serve for a three-year term with a maximum of two consecutive terms. However, they will need to be reelected by the church at the end of each term if they have a desire to continue and the church has a need. We desire to have as much continuity in care and leadership as we can while avoiding burnout and creating space for other qualified leaders to be trained and serve.

## Are the terms “Pastor” and “Elder” two words for the same role?

Yes (with some nuance). The two terms seem interchangeable based on how they are used in Scripture (see Acts 20:17, 28 and 1 Pet. 5:1-3; see the [Lexicon](#) for more information). However, the words have a different connotation for many in our culture. We will use “Elder” to refer to the non-staff shepherds/overseers and the word “Pastor” to refer to the paid-staff shepherds/overseers. It is important to note that Elders and Pastors should be seen as equals with the distinction being primarily about the amount of time and vocational attention each one can give to the role. We will see the Elders as leading in pastoral ways.

## Is every Pastor automatically an Elder?

No. Though every pastor must meet the qualifications of an elder as outlined in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, not every paid-staff pastor will serve on the Elder Team. This is primarily due to the conviction that at any given time we should have more non-paid Elders than we have paid Elders. The proposal is that only the Lead Pastor (Kris McGee) will also be an Elder at the beginning, however, it may be beneficial in the future for some paid-staff pastors (i.e. Associate Pastors) to also be on the Elder Team.

## Why do we want to have more non-staff Elders than staff Elders?

There are two main reasons for this:

- 1) We believe that God has given gifts to the members of the church for the building up of the Body (Eph. 4). This means we should be developing and deploying the people God had given us to help lead and serve in our body.

- 2) We think the Elder Team will be healthier when the majority of the men in the room are making decisions for the church without the stress or pressure of what it could mean for their 9-5 job. While we anticipate and pray for unity among our elders, in the event that there is conflict, strong disagreements, or the need to remove an elder, we think it would be best to limit the added complexity that could come from someone's job potentially being on the line.

### **Will the church provide ongoing resources, training, and support for the Elders and the Ezer Team members?**

Yes. The health of our leaders is essential to the health of the church. We will budget resources for training, retreats, and development for these teams. There will also be budget funds available to the Elders and Ezer Team members to lift some of the personal financial impact that comes with the added meetings with members over coffee or meals. Essentially, we want to resource and support these men and women to fulfill the tasks we are calling them to.

We would also like to increase the support and resources available to our existing Deacons and Ministry Team Chairs.

### **How many Elders do we hope will be on the team?**

We will not dictate a specific number so that we have flexibility to have as many Elders as we need. We also don't feel pressure to meet a certain quota. That said, we believe four to eight is the ideal range to help maintain relational trust, intimacy, and efficiency among the Elders. We imagine we will start smaller and then grow.

### **How many Ezers will be on the team?**

Again, like with the Elder Team, we will not dictate an exact number so we can have flexibility, but we think four to eight would be ideal.

### **What if an elder disqualifies himself and needs to be removed?**

Just as the church has the authority to affirm and ordain elders, the church has the authority to remove an elder who is no longer qualified to serve in the role. Scripture makes provision for this situation in 1 Timothy 5:19-25:

“Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. 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. Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure .... The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.”

Jesus's teaching in Matthew 18:15-20 is also relevant. In this sad and difficult situation, we will trust God and seek to follow his Word. Our hope would be for repentance and restoration, but in the event an Elder needs to be removed, the church members will make this decision by ballot vote.

### **Will there be female paid staff members on the Ezer Team?**

We will not insist on this, but if the Ezer Team is seen as the “spiritual moms” of the congregation, we imagine some of our female staff members will fall into the category. Our church members will still need to nominate and vote for any woman who gets placed on the Ezer Team. Initially, we anticipate Sarah Guild being nominated for the Ezer Team.

### **Will there be a chair of the Elders and Ezer Teams?**

This seems wise and helpful. We imagine there will be individuals on the teams who have administrative gifts that would lend themselves to fulfilling chair roles. We think it could also be another check and balance to power if there was a non-staff chair on each team.

### **How will things change when/if we add Elders and Ezer Teams to our Leadership Structure?**

Our desire is that you only experience an increase in our church's ability to shepherd and care for you. Our current pastors and staff love our people and delight to lead, care for, and meet with people face to face. You will still have access to your pastors and staff. Your Deacons will continue to pray for and serve you. The changes you will experience should revolve around increased stability, health, and wisdom.

### **Does adding the Ezer Team mean women at Hope will have less access to male elders/pastors?**

No. The vision behind adding the Ezer Team is to provide additional layers of care for the women in our body, not to take away what currently exists. Women will still have access to pastors, elders, and staff in addition to members of the Ezer Team. Our hope is that the Ezer Team will ensure we have even more trained and resourced individuals available to offer counseling, care, and discipleship for women in our church. Think both/and not an either/or.

## Will there be voting?

Yes. We will remain a congregational church so every member will continue to vote on significant decisions. See the list [on page 25](#) for more on what the congregation votes on.

As far as the Elders voting on the best way to shepherd our church, we desire to lead by consensus. As a practice, if we do not have consensus among our Elders, that will flag for us to slow down, pray, and listen more. Rarely will we be in a situation where we feel pressured to make an immediate decision, which will allow us the necessary time to hear concerns and make needed adjustments. However, if after an appropriate time of prayer, discernment, and discussion there still is not consensus, our Elders will follow the pattern of our bylaws and require a three-fourths vote for a decision to pass.

That said, there is a difference between a disagreement that is more of an “I think we should go left versus right” and a disagreement that is more of a “I think this is right versus wrong.” If an Elder believes a decision being made by the majority is morally wrong and contrary to God’s Word, then we will stop and involve more people for additional wisdom, insight, and accountability.

## Does anyone have veto power?

No. In light of the biblical command to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ,” we don’t think anyone should have veto or unilateral power. There may be a situation where the Lead Pastor and/or Elders discern that the church is moving quickly in a dangerous or unhealthy direction so they may call to stop or slow down a meeting or decision (i.e. they can pull the emergency break) to give time to pray and seek God’s help, but we don’t believe leaders should just push ahead on something if there is not congregational approval as defined in the bylaws.

## Will Elders also be on our official Ministry Teams? (Personnel, Finance, Property, Hospitality, etc.)

We don’t think they will have time:) Elders should be welcome to attend meetings and willing to help when asked/needed, but as a policy we won’t require each team to have an Elder on it or for each Elder to serve on a Ministry Team. Also, we hope that the coordination of the Leadership Team can help this not feel necessary. We also anticipate Ministry Teams giving reports and/or sharing burdens in Elders’ meetings, which should also help with communication and awareness and a sense of unity.

# Appendix: Survey Of Female Leadership In The Bible

by Kris McGee for Hope Community Church - October 2023<sup>8</sup>

As we consider what the Bible says about women in church leadership and specifically address the question of if the Scriptures call women to serve in an elder role, I want to take a broader approach than simply looking at a few passages at the center of the debate (i.e. 1 Cor. 11:2-16, 1 Cor. 14:34-35, and 1 Tim. 2:8-15). If we focus on a few passages, we risk missing the beauty of God's design in creating men and women with complementarity and with unique differences. Also when we start with a few "I don't permit" passages, the conversation tragically tips towards what can't be done or is restricted, which malforms our thinking and unnecessarily distorts the biblical portrait. This often results in shifting the conversation to a focus on things like rights, power, and positions. I don't believe the Bible starts or finishes the conversation about God's design for men and women in those places. The biblical story is one of partnership, mission, dignity, mutuality, service, joy, and beauty. I address this more fully in a video titled "[Does the Bible Say Only Men Can Be Elders?](#)" that can be found on our website under the Resource tab.

So, to help us, I want us to consider five categories:

1) God's **original design** given in Genesis 1-2 and referenced in several of the related NT passages (i.e. 1 Cor. 11:2-16, Eph. 5:21-33, 1 Tim. 2:8-15).

2) The **larger biblical narrative** to see examples of how women were leading and serving in both the OT and NT. It is important to ask what specifically do we see women doing in the narrative of Scriptures? How do we see Jesus relating to women in the Gospels? What is the redemptive arc of the Bible (i.e. women receiving more honor in the Bible than the culture around them gave)? This larger landscape will help us see God's design in action and also help us understand passages that may seem contradictory. For example, if we see places where women were teaching or praying or prophesying publicly and then read a passage that says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet" (1 Tim. 2:12 NIV), then we know we must slow down to ask what kind of teaching is 1 Timothy 2:12 referring to and how is that different from what we see women doing in ways that are affirmed in other places (i.e. Priscilla and her husband both teaching and correcting Apollos in Acts 18:26)?

3) The **specific passages** that give commands, guidance, instruction, and structure to the church as well as examples of women leading, teaching, hosting churches, etc.

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<sup>8</sup> The content of this document was originally presented to the Elder Advisory Team at Hope Community Church as part of our research and discernment process as we considered the possibility of adding elders to our leadership structure. It reflects previous conversations we had as a team as well as information we interacted with from several resources. I say that because many of those are assumed without citation. It would have taken too long to go back and record all the citations, but please know there is no intention of representing someone else's ideas as my own or to withhold credit from any scholar or participant of the team. I would be happy to share the resources I interacted with during this process that have shaped my thinking. So as you read, please consider this a draft and an internal working document.

4) Acknowledgment and naming of **examples of failure** to live into God's ideal that we see in Scripture (i.e. stories of failure in the Bible that are given as warnings not to be followed), history, culture, and our specific church.

5) Keep the **goal or "telos"** of gender, the church, offices in the church (elders and deacons), spiritual gifts, etc. at the center in an effort to ground, encourage, and inform us. The Kingdom ethic of the NT is not so much asking about authority or equality but honor and inclusion, oneness and unity, honor, service, and love for one another. That is where the renewal and restoration of the Kingdom is heading and what we will ultimately live into one day.

Here is a diagram to help us visually.

Notice the goal/telos is at the center. This is how I want to lead our church. We must continually ask (of everything!!!) "How does this help us live into God's design for His Kingdom and help us reflect His heart to save the world as His ambassadors?" Let's keep the original garden (Gen. 1-2) as well as the future garden (Rev. 21-22) in mind as we name where we come from and long for where we are going!!



With that framework in mind, here are some passages I'd like you to read and be familiar with. Remember, every translation is an interpretation and has a theological bias. The translations we use are reliable, but they are making translation decisions (i.e. words can have a range of meaning, so how do you know what meaning best fits this context). An example is the word *γυναῖκός* in Paul's instruction to deacons in 1 Timothy 3:11. The word can be translated as "woman" or "wife."

- If you read it translated as "woman" as in the NIV ("In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything"), you would be inclined to see a provision for women to be deacons and this verse would be describing qualifications for her.
- If you read it translated as "wife"<sup>9</sup> as in the ESV ("Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things"), you would be inclined to see a further qualification for a male deacon—namely that his wife must be a godly woman.

The good news is that even when the translators make a significant decision like this, you will often see a footnote to the other translation option. This helps us know that the translation

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<sup>9</sup> A translation like the CSB chooses to leave it ambiguous by not adding "the" or "their" to push the reader to make some decisions. They just translate it "Wives, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything." This is more technically accurate to the original language but more ambiguous for the reader ... sometimes that can be a good thing. :)

committee made a judgment call, but they are not attempting to hide something from the reader. So ... all that to say, slow down, look up the footnotes, and compare some translations. Even *The Message* can be helpful to see some of the possible translations.

Naming this should give us a ton of humility as we work through these texts. All of us are dependent on trustworthy scholars who love the Bible, are experts in ancient languages and cultures, and still disagree at some key places. This is why I think looking at the broader landscape of the Bible will help us. When we are faced with a decision on how to understand a particular word, we can put it in the larger context of what we see more clearly in the rest of the Bible. To help you, here is [a document with a few different translations](#) next to each other for the debated passages.

In addition, below are the passages I'd love for you to consider for the wider context. I tried to group them some but notice that the five circles in the graphic above are drawn with some overlap on purpose (a venn diagram of sorts) to show that some verses don't fit into just one of my "arbitrary" categories and that there is some overlap in the categories. Don't worry too much if a passage should be under a different heading—just focus on the meaning and impact of the passage.

[Disclaimer]: You will quickly see that I have an agenda in the passages I am choosing for you to consider. I am trying to highlight for us that we see women function in really significant ways in the Bible—both in the larger narrative and specifically in the early church. I have a strong desire and conviction for us to function in line with the Scriptures. I believe women should be doing more, not less, than what we see in the average evangelical church. I don't think that means there cannot be distinction and complementarity between functional roles for women and men, but I desire to show that the Scriptures offer a much more robust vision of complementarity than is usually found in our denomination.

Here are the passages to consider grouped under some headings. The ones with an \* are in a [document for you](#) (also linked above) in four different versions—ESV, NIV, CSB, and KJV. This should give you enough variety to see some of the important choices at the center of the issues.

## God's Original Design

**Genesis 1-2 is referenced in several relevant NT passages<sup>10</sup> (i.e. 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Ephesians 5:21-33):**

- Particularly that God made both man and woman in his own image (Gen 1:26-27), that they were both given the creation mandate to be fruitful and multiply as well as "fill and subdue the earth" (Gen 1:28). Also the language of "bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh" and "oneness" speak of equality (Gen 2:23-24).

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 19:1-12 and 1 Cor. 6:12-20 also quote Genesis 1 and 2 to ground teaching about divorce and sexual purity, which are very significant but not necessarily pertinent to the focus of this document.

- Some debate is around what is meant that God made Eve to be a “helper suitable” for Adam in Genesis 2:18 (note the contrast that there was not a helper suitable found for Adam among the animals—Gen. 2:20). Here is a [helpful podcast from Kristi McLelland on the meaning of “helper suitable.”](#) In the Bible God is also called our “helper” (same word), so this is not a demeaning phrase but rather a strong word communicating the need or weakness of the one who is receiving the help. The words “helper suitable” have more to do with matching or completing as the word for “suitable” can be translated “like, in front of, opposite, or corresponding.” Look on [BibleGateWay.com](#) to see how this gets translated.

## The Larger Biblical Narrative

### Sample of Women Highlighted in the OT

- Hebrew midwives protecting children under Pharaoh’s murderous decree - Exodus 1:8-22
- Miriam - Exodus 15:20-21; Micah 6:4
- Debra - Judges 4-5
- Jael - Judges 4
- Huldah - 2 Kings 22:14-20; 2 Chronicles 34:22-28
- Abigail - 1 Samuel 25
- Ruth
- Esther
- The daughters of Zelophehad - Numbers 27:1-11
- The four women named in Jesus’s genealogy in Matthew 1: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba. Scholars note that it is significant and unusual for women (especially women with these social classes/backgrounds) to be named in a genealogy.

### Sample of Women Highlighted in the NT

Interactions with Jesus and women—see the way He honors and elevates women who would have been seen as a lower class in the ancient world:

- Mary the mother of Jesus
- Anna - Luke 2:36-38 - she was a prophet at the time of Jesus’s birth and one of the first to testify about the redemption that Jesus would bring.
- The woman at the well - John 4 - Jesus engages in a theological debate with her and she goes to her village as the first missionary
- Woman with the issue of blood - Luke 8:43-48 - Jesus allowing himself to be touched by this woman would have been shocking.
- Mary and Martha - John 11 - they were friends and early disciples. Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet is an image of a “disciple” which would not be the cultural norm.
- The woman (Mary?) who anointed Jesus’s feet - Luke 7:36-50 - Jesus both praises her and contrasts her response to the response of the religious leaders (most likely all males).
- Women are seen as more faithful and courageous than the male disciples at the cross and the first to go to his tomb—both of these would have been dangerous.
- Women are the first to bear witness of the resurrected Christ.



### **Narratives highlighting women leading in various ways in the book of Acts**

- Lydia was a leader in the early church - Acts 16:13-40
- Priscilla always listed before her husband - Acts 18:26
- 4 Daughters of Philip the evangelist are called prophetesses - Acts 21:9
- Euodia and Syntyche are named as those who “contended at my [Paul’s] side in the cause of the gospel” and were considered co-workers. - Philippians 4:3

### **Notice how many women leaders are named just in Romans 16**

- Phoebe - most likely a deacon of the church in Cenchreae
- Priscilla - she and her husband Aquila are called co-workers in Christ Jesus and together they hosted a house church
- Mary
- Junia - said to be outstanding or esteemed among the apostles
- Tryphaena and Tryphosa
- Rufus’s mother
- Julia
- Nereus’s sister

These examples show us women throughout the Bible leading in a variety of meaningful and robust ways. However, one thing that stands out in the narrative is that we never see a female leader identified as an elder. We see women named as prophets, teachers, and deacons, and even doing the work of an evangelist, but we don’t see them named as the elder or spiritual overseer of a local church. Though we must not exaggerate this, it seems consistent with the idea that elders serve in the “dad role” of the spiritual family. This does not diminish the role of spiritual moms, but we recognize it as a distinct role.

## **Other Passages that Help Shape Our Understanding of the Scripture’s Portrait of Men and Women Co-Laboring**

### **Galatians 3:26-29**

This passage says, “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (ESV).

While not erasing distinctions between race, class, or gender, the Gospel provides an equality where we often find division.

### **Colossians 3:16**

We are told to “teach and admonish” one another. This is significant in light of the discussion of what kind of teaching Paul is addressing in 1 Timothy 2:12.

### **Ephesians 5:21**

Call to mutual submission as part of what it means to be filled with the Spirit. Paul goes on to describe what that looks like in a marriage, for parents and children, and slaves and masters.

We see the same pattern in Colossians 3:18-4:1 where application is made to these three relationships after instructions on what walking by the Spirit looks like.

### **Ephesians 5:22-33, Colossians 3:18-19, 1 Peter 3:1-7**

I include passages here for husbands and wives to help us think about the church as “the family of God” and my desire for the mothers and fathers of our church to lead the family together. These instructions to wives and husbands are not the same as offices/roles in the church, but they inform how we understand roles with distinction and yet equality. They also shape our understanding of “headship” in terms of self-sacrifice, service, care, help, cherishing, honoring, concern for holiness, even oneness (husbands should love their wives as their own body—Eph 5:25-29). There is a consistent reference to Christ in these passages for both the men and women. I think headship implies that men have a “unique responsibility” to care for, serve, and lead, but Jesus warns us that we think more like the world when we think about leadership in terms of power, position, and authority (Mark 10:35-45). I want to own that it is almost impossible for us to think about leadership without the current cultural lens of power and privilege. This is not the way the Bible talks (unless you understand power and privilege as a means to an end of protecting, honoring, serving, sacrificing, and caring for others). These passages provide a helpful corrective to the world’s view and match the way we see Jesus leading with a towel and wash basin as He washes the disciples feet (John 13:1-20).

## **Specific Passages that Give Commands, Guidance, Instruction, and Boundaries to the Church Regarding Women Leading and Teaching**

[Here](#) again is a document that has the following passages in four parallel versions with the footnotes included so you can see some of the translation decisions that need to be made.

While it is not always clear where it starts and stops, these passages outline some boundaries between the role of men and women in the church. I feel most confident saying that the distinctions being made in the following passages are referring to the authoritative teaching that is reserved for the role of the elders. Therefore the following passages are not calling for the total silence of women in the church or saying a woman can never teach a man anything, but rather that God intends the male elders to lead the church and that their authority is often expressed in the teaching and guarding of orthodox doctrine. The interpretive issues with the following passages are complex, but they should not be discarded simply as cultural and therefore no longer relevant for us today. Rather, we should ask what was the passage’s original intention and then ask how we can express that same intention in our context.

### **1 Corinthians 11:2-16\***

In this passage Paul gives instructions to both men and women about praying and prophesying publicly. This is the “headcoverings passage.” A few things I want you to notice as you look at the text in a few translations and read commentaries:

- Both men and women needed instruction/correction.

- Both men and women were in fact publicly praying and prophesying in the gathering. This is important when we think about what it could mean later that Paul says he doesn't permit a woman to speak but should remain silent in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.
- This is much debated but it is significant that Paul ties the logic and motivation/orientation for his instruction in both creation and the trinity. That is relevant to the question of "Isn't the Bible just reflecting the culture of the ancient world?"
- I also want you to see the role of interdependence that Paul names (1 Cor. 11:11-12) almost as if he is anticipating the temptation to think in terms of "equality" or "ranking" rather than mutuality and partnership.
- I think the final verse about not being contentious is also instructive (1 Cor. 11:16).

Also the following context of 1 Cor. 11 is very significant. After instructions and corrections regarding the Lord's Supper and the misuse of power leading to a lack of unity (1 Cor. 11:17-34), Paul spends three chapters on the use of spiritual gifts in the church. Chapter 12 highlights the pride and insecurity that usually happen when there is diversity of gifting (1 Cor. 12:14-26) before he lists some of the gifts (1 Cor. 12:27-31) and then he talks about the essential nature of love over the use of and comparison of the gifts (1 Cor. 13:1-7) before he tells us that the gifts are only temporary ... but love (and its implications) are forever (1 Cor. 13:8-13). That doesn't mean we shouldn't desire the gifts or work hard to understand their function in the church (1 Cor. 14:1) but that love is the orienting reality in how we understand both the use and function of the gifts in the church. They are a means of love and mutual upbuilding for the church (Eph. 4:1-18). This is the goal/telos. It is massive for us to keep the larger teaching and goal of Scripture in mind.

### **1 Corinthians 14:34-35\***

This is the passage that says, "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says" (NIV). This is given in the context of orderly worship and instruction on how to practice/test the gift of prophecy in the church. Cultural context is often part of the debate and understanding of what is being taught here.

### **1 Timothy 2:8-15\***

This is the passage where Paul says, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet" (1 Tim. 2:12 NIV). As you look at the passage note the character by which men and women are to pray publicly. I take the instructions to modest dress and hair as the parallel to the instructions to anger and quarreling to men as common temptations or something specific they were dealing with in that community.

There is a lot of mystery here (i.e. what does it mean that a woman will be saved through childbearing), but there are three things we must deal with:

- 1) What is being instructed/prohibited in verses 11-12? What kind of teaching is this and how does this connect to authority?
- 2) Why does Paul tie this to creation in verses 13-15?

- 3) How does the context that immediately follows help us understand Paul's meaning and intention? Notice the next section is where the role and qualifications of elders are named (1 Timothy 3:1-7).

When held with the larger biblical narrative and the examples we see in Scripture, these three passages lead me to believe that the role of elder in the local church is reserved for men. For more detail and to hear me further explain, you can watch the video "[Does the Bible Say Only Men Can Be Elders?](#)" which can be found on our website under the Resource tab.

As you interact with these passages, pray for unity, humility, and joy as we ask God to lead our church in this season. We have a deep desire to represent the beautiful mutuality between men and women outlined in the Scriptures as we consider the addition of both an elder team and a complimenting team of women leaders.