

Church leadership structure

The Bible lays out some practical guidelines for leadership in the church. Leadership is not about the one's leading it is about obedience to God and carrying out the mission of Jesus. The guidelines we receive are to help organize the church into a powerful, life giving community.

Authority

In the New Testament the term pastor and the term elder are used interchangeably. The word for elder literally means overseer while the word for pastor literally means shepherd. Both names describe the roles these positions were designed to fulfill. Pastors and elders were positions of authority in the church given to those who care for and tend to the needs of the church.

Senior pastor

Jesus is the lead pastor of the church. He is not just the one we are searching for, he is the one leading us. He is the head shepherd and ultimate authority in the church. His leadership is absolute.

Lead pastor

The lead pastor is the first shepherd among men. He is an authority in the church but not the ultimate authority in the church. His role is to carry out the instructions of the true shepherd, Jesus. The lead pastor is responsible for teaching what Jesus taught, loving the people Jesus loved, protecting the people Jesus protected, and following the lead and direction Jesus sets. As the primary teacher for the church he serves as the first among equals with the leadership. He is responsible to God for leading the congregation faithfully and selflessly in the direction God dictates.

Primary roles:

- Preach
- Teach
- Cast vision
- Develop leaders
- Protect the congregation
- Love the congregation
- Makes disciples

Accountable to:

Jesus
Elders

Gender exclusive: Yes

Elders

Elders are the spiritual overseers of the church. Their job is to keep the church on mission, protect against false teaching, protect the pastors, guard the vision, and constantly seek the direction and guidance of God. They lead alongside the lead pastor submitting themselves to the authority of the senior pastor, Jesus. They lead primarily in the direction of the church. Their focus should remain on big picture items affecting the church and dealing with the spiritual issues it faces. They are champions of the vision, advisors and encouragers of the pastors, and influencers of the church.

Primary roles:

Teach
Pray
Lead spiritually
Protect and promote the vision
Guard against false teaching
Support and defend the pastors
Keep the church on mission
Keep the church focused
Make disciples

Accountable to:

Jesus
Lead pastor

Gender exclusive: Yes

Pastors

Not all pastors are the lead pastor. There are other roles in the church in which the person serving is doing so as a shepherd caring for the flock. To which extent the role should be defined as pastor versus minister (see below) will vary based on the nature of the role and how the person in it operates. An example of another pastoral role would be youth ministry.

Primary roles:

Teach
Pray
Promote the vision

Guard against false teaching
Lead their ministry area
Love the congregation
Protect the congregation
Make disciples

Accountable to:

Jesus
Lead pastor
Elders

Gender exclusive: Yes

Ministers

Ministers are servants who operate in a specific field or area. Ministers are lead servants who head up various areas of ministry for the church. They are ministry leaders who operate under the authority of the elders and pastors. Ministers are hugely important leaders who carry out essential functions in the church. They care for the congregation and minister to them. The primary difference between a pastor and a minister is not involvement or investment. It is responsibility. While we are all responsible to Jesus for how we live our lives ministers are less accountable because they operate under the delegates authority of elders and/or pastors.

Primary roles:

Serve
Carry out tasks assigned to them
Care for the congregation
Organize and develop their area of ministry
Manage their area of responsibility well
Set an example
Make disciples

Accountable to:

Jesus
Elders
Lead pastor
Supervising pastor (if applicable)

Gender exclusive: No

Deacons

Deacons are the primary servants of the church. They play an essential role in taking care of the physical needs of the church so that the elders are free to focus on the spiritual needs of the church. Deacons handle the running of the practical church needs. They operate as leaders with the delegates authority of the elders.

Ref. acts 6: when the Greeks started complaining that their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food the disciples appointed deacons. They decided that, while the issue of taking care of widows was very important, it was not what God had set them apart to do. The apostles needed to focus on preaching and prayer, so deacons were appointed to meet the physical needs of the church. Deacons are the servant-leaders who keep the church running week in and week out.

Primary roles:

- Serving the church
- Supporting the vision
- Tending to the physical needs of the church
- Managing the operations of the church
- Making disciples

Accountable to:

- Jesus
- Lead pastor
- Elders
- Other pastors (if applicable)
- Ministers

Gender exclusive: No

Serve staff

Deacons are an official church office that operate with biblical authority as servant leaders in the church. There are qualifications for deacons, ministers, pastors, and elders laid out in Timothy and Titus. Not everyone meets those qualifications or is ready for positions of leadership in the church. That doesn't mean however that they don't need to be/are not ready to be serving in various capacities. Serve staff are members of the congregation who are ready and willing to serve but are not yet ready or willing for the responsibility of a leadership position. This could be because they are a new believer, lack maturity in the faith, are not qualified for leadership based on their past or current life situation, or simply because they lack the time, availability, or desire to operate in a leadership position. Leadership positions are for those who are sold out for the gospel, theologically sound, committed to the church, champion the vision, are above reproach, serve, and maintain a strong personal relationship with Jesus. For those who are not quite ready for that, there is the serve staff. These are the hands and feet of the church. Their investment in service allows the leading servants to operate smoothly and effectively.

Primary roles:

- Serve
- Support
- Keep things running smoothly
- Invest in the lives of others

Grow into leadership position
Make disciples

Accountable to:

Jesus
All pastors
Elders
Ministers
Deacons

Gender exclusive:

No

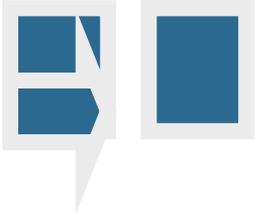
Authority Breakdown

God

Jesus

Lead Pastor

Elders



Other pastors



Ministers



Deacons



Serve staff



Congregation