

## **How an Eldership Functions**

**By Bill Scheidler**

### **I. The Foundation for a Biblically Functioning Eldership**

If the senior pastor is to have a strong, functioning eldership team, the senior pastor must have four deep convictions:

A. A strong conviction concerning the biblical basis for eldership.

If a strong eldership is going to happen, we must have strong faith, based upon a clear biblical revelation that eldership is the only form of church government that will ultimately build churches that last and churches that prevail. This understanding will help you work through the difficulties of bringing an eldership into being.

B. A strong conviction that the biblical qualifications for eldership are applicable for the church today (I Timothy 3; Titus 1).

The qualifications listed in the Bible are applicable to every culture and every age and are the only insurance policy that an eldership will work as God intended it to work. If these qualifications are not stringently adhered to, an eldership can be just as dysfunctional as any other unbiblical form.

C. A commitment to wait until these qualities to emerge.

One should never be in a hurry to set in elders (I Tim. 5:22). We must be willing to wait even if it takes a few years.

Things to look for in a good team member:

1. Faithfulness
2. Teachable (Adjustable, Learns quickly)
3. Maturity (Strong Christian character, fruit of the Spirit, exemplary lifestyle)
4. Diligence (Not slothful, hard working, finishes tasks)
5. Willingness
6. Lover of People
7. Full of Faith (Not negative about things or the future)
8. Spirit of Cooperation
9. Self-motivated
10. A Gatherer (people love to be around them)

11. Loyal to Friends (healthy long term friendships)

12. Lover of God and His Word

D. A commitment to the principle of unity (Acts 1:14; 2:1; 4:23-24, 32-33).

Unless each leader is committed to the principle of unity and is willing to defer personal tastes to the body of elders, a team will never function properly. It will lead to divisions in the body (I Cor. 1:10; 3:1-4; Jam. 4:1-2).

## **II. The Importance of a Clear Description of Function**

A. The function of the senior pastor includes several things (Note: There may be some variation depending on gifts and experience of the person involved).

The senior pastor serves as the pastoral team leader and as such is:

1. The public spokesperson and principle leader (who drives the bus).
2. The ex officio chairman of all boards and committees. This means that there are to be no secret meetings without the knowledge of the senior leader.
3. Sets the principal vision and is responsible for the overall spiritual health of the church. Certainly the team will enhance this vision and add to it, but the senior pastor must feel it or own it.
4. In charge of all public services of the church (everything that happens on the platform including the music and worship ministries).
5. Calls all elder's meetings and approves (screens) the agenda.
6. The official nominator of all new elders (confirmed by all elders).
7. Has limited financial latitude (especially in the area of honorariums).
8. Maintains doctrinal purity (no change in doctrine without his approval).
9. Approves and invites all guest and local speakers (determines who speaks and when).
10. Has final say on all hiring and firing (veto rights on all staffing).
11. Approves all special meetings of the church.
12. Oversees all ministry placement and the job description of team members much like the coach on a sports team.

B. The functions of the eldership

The eldership as a unit has corporate functions relating to the following:

1. Processing and approving all church discipline (i.e. excommunication).
2. Confirming new elders and church members.
3. Endorsing any changes in doctrinal positions.
4. Approving overall budget and finances of the church.
5. Approving of all ministries sent out and supported by church including church plants.
6. Approving all buying and selling of real property.
7. Approving schedule changes in church life (service times, etc.).
8. Helping establish policy for how things are handled.
9. Governing the general affairs of the church (i.e. church programs).

### **III. How an Elders' Meeting Works (Acts 1 and 15)**

- A. Proposal (Acts 1:15; 15:6) – Presentation of the issue at hand
- B. Discussion (Acts 1:23; 15:7, 12, 13) – Testimony, gathering and sharing data, Scriptures, etc.
- C. Prayer (Acts 1:24)
- D. Agreement (Acts 1:26; 15:22, 25)
- E. Action (Acts 1:26; 15:30) – No action without agreement!

### **IV. Some Challenges in Working with an Eldership**

- A. Must allow for mistakes.
- B. Everybody must be accountable to somebody.
- C. Watch the political ambitions of team members.
- D. Be sensitive to tension between peers, division, and submission to other team members.
- E. Spend quality time with each other.
- F. Foster open lines of communication (cannot let anything go without talking).
- G. Poor counsel by an elder that reflects on the whole eldership (giving eldership a bad rap).

**V. Other Things that will make an Eldership Function Smoothly**

- A. Administrative Chart
- B. Clear Written Job Descriptions
- C. Accountability Assignments
- D. Proper Scheduling/Calendar Planning
- E. Special Retreats and Activities
- F. Regular Meetings, Business and Relational