

Examples of Elder Roles

Probably some of the most common questions are summed up in ones such as:

- What exactly will elders do?
- How are they different in function than our current board of deacons?
- What kind of authority do they have?
- What kinds of decisions will they make on behalf of the church?

Perhaps the most effective way to answer open questions like this will be to describe situations that our church is familiar with, and describe the role of elders in those scenarios.

ANNUAL BUDGET

Approaching budget season, the elders begin to review the year in ministry, considering a broad overview of what God has been accomplishing in our church. They seek insight and understanding about where He may be leading us, and through a commitment of prayer, they provide the committees with suggestions on priorities for the coming year's budget.

Once the individual budgets are compiled by the finance committee, the elders review it to see how it may align with the best emphasis of ministry for our church. The elders generate conversations with each committee if needed in the cooperative effort to see our budget plans align with ministry goals.

Once this has been achieved, it is presented to the membership for final explanation and approval by membership vote.

MINISTRY PLANS

The best analogy for understanding the relationship between ongoing ministries and the elders is to envision a sandbox. The elders work to establish the structure of the sandbox - the doctrinal boundaries of the church that frame our behaviours.

The deacons, other committees and ministry teams build the sandcastles - create, build and re-build, design and refine the ministries that make our church beautiful. As long as it's within our "boundaries", we should not expect that new or renewed ministries need the "permission" of elders.

The essence of the elders role is not control or permissions, it's oversight (big picture), prayer and encouragement.

HIRING of STAFF

In the hiring of pastoral staff, the role of the elders is to provide some guidance for the congregation and search committees as to what kind of pastoral gifts and qualities may be most beneficial for our church. Again, the emphasis is guidance, not permissions. The final approval for hiring of pastoral staff should always remain with the membership.

In an incorporated church, the elders are also the legal board of directors, so hiring and management of office or other staff is their responsibility. Although the hiring would technically be the role of the elders, this would best be done through forward budget planning and a committed effort to communicate well with the membership about staffing plans.

EXPENSES and FINANCE

Budgets are great planning tools, but sometimes in the calendar of church ministry, unexpected expenses come along. Often, people feel like they need approval from leadership before such things can be pursued.

This would be an example of something that doesn't need to involve elders at all. Individual committees should be managing their own budgets, perhaps with input from the finance committee, but with really no need for elders to be involved.

CHURCH DOCTRINE and POLICY

The most critical words to remember when thinking through how elders would lead our church in matters of sound doctrine and operating boundaries are COMMUNICATION and TRUST. Elders must work to over-achieve in communications to a church family, and when they do, membership needs to learn to trust their intentions, dedication and work.