

ELDER FRAMEWORK

HOW WILL FIRST BAPTIST
GARNER IMPLEMENT AN
ELDER TEAM?



2024-2025

ELDER FRAMEWORK

OPENING:

This framework is intentionally narrow in scope, and its purpose is to focus on the practical implementation of a Christ-ruled, elder-led, and congregationally accountable model of church governance at First Baptist Garner. Therefore, this framework will not address the following questions: “Why should First Baptist Garner transition to be elder-led?” “What does Scripture say about elders and deacons?” “How do other churches implement elders?” This framework answers one question: How will First Baptist Garner implement an elder team?

THE PROCESS OF SELECTING ELDERS:

First Baptist Garner is congregational in polity, and therefore, the process of selecting elders starts with the congregation. Any member of the congregation may suggest names of men they observe to be qualified and who demonstrate the gifts of leadership, teaching, and shepherding. These names are to be submitted via letter or email to any active elder or to the receptionist in the church office. There will not be a predetermined period of collecting names; instead, the elder team will consistently be collecting suggested names from the congregation.

As a need arises via an elder rotating off or an increased need for shepherds, the current elder team will evaluate the submitted names. The names will first be vetted in light of the qualifications outlined in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3, thus removing the names of those not biblically qualified. Those who are biblically qualified will then be vetted based on the expectations of our membership to accomplish the purpose of our church as we worship, serve, connect, and give. We expect every candidate for the elder team to model our purpose by regularly attending corporate worship, being connected to other believers in a Life Group, serving our church family, giving of their resources for the building of the Kingdom of God, and actively making disciples. Lastly, we will consider the way this candidate would affect the current team and how they align with our short-term and long-term vision of our church. After a background check and social media check, the most qualified candidate(s) would move on to examination by the elder team after unanimous agreement by the current elders.

EXAMINATION:

The examination would start with a one-on-one (or two) current elder and candidate meeting. During that meeting, their aspiration to serve (1 Timothy 3:1), as well as their personal assessment of their qualifications, would be discussed. If they are willing and do not disqualify themselves, then we would bring them to an elder meeting for them to observe the role of being an elder. Then after a period of time, we would call an elder meeting to examine their testimony, calling, and doctrinal beliefs and convictions. If the elders are in unanimous agreement, the elder candidate will be presented to the church.

PRESENTATION AND AFFIRMATION:

During a Sunday morning service or Members Meeting, the Lead Pastor would present the candidate. This candidate would be presented as a recommendation from the elder team, and the church would be given one month to bring concerns or reasons why they feel the man presented is not biblically qualified to serve as an elder. If a member has an objection, it must be brought to a current elder or submitted via a signed letter to the front office. If no objections are found, then this person will be affirmed as an elder and then ordained by this church to serve as an elder. This method of affirmation might seem peculiar or insignificant, and for that reason, the rationale behind this method must be articulated.

First, the Bible does not provide a “proper” method for selecting elders. Therefore, this is a matter of wisdom and prudence. In researching the methods used by other churches, the current pastors have determined that this method seems to work the best. There are many reasons they have come to this decision. First, allowing the church membership to voice concerns is vital. Although the elders will vet and examine the men, there could be things that are done outside of the church that could disqualify the candidate of which the elders are not aware. Particularly, there are church members who might be aware that the man does not meet the qualification outlined by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:7 of having “a good reputation among outsiders (in the community).”

The second reason the pastors chose this method was to avoid the common issue among other churches of selecting elders based on popularity. Becoming an elder is not about popularity; it’s about character, giftings, and an aspiration cultivated by the Holy Spirit. Lastly, this removes potential situations that promote division in our church family; Scripture is clear in Ephesians 4:3 that we must make “every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

ORDINATION OF A LAY ELDER

Lay elder candidates, those vetted and examined by the current elder team and approved by the congregation, who do not aspire to vocational ministry, will be ordained as elders of our church. The following procedures will be followed in the ordination process. During the examination process, the current elders will evaluate the candidate's theological convictions and character against the standards expressed in God's Word. If the elder team finds the candidate worthy of ordination, they may ordain the candidate on behalf of the church following the affirmation of the congregation. The Lead Pastor shall arrange for the ordination service.

TERM AND NUMBER OF LAY ELDERS

The lay elders would serve for a term of six years. There is nothing special about this duration; however, since elders are given the responsibility of shepherding, it seemed necessary to give adequate time for those shepherding relationships to form with each family. The number of elders will be determined by the number of members of First Baptist Garner. An elder will be responsible for roughly twenty to twenty-five households, and thus the number of households will determine the number of elders needed for the shepherding of our church family.

THE EXPECTATIONS OF LAY ELDERS

The role of lay elders in our church comes with clear and significant expectations. These men are responsible for teaching, shepherding, setting a Christ-honoring example, and overseeing different aspects of our church's ministries. Specifically, we expect lay elders to consistently demonstrate the universal call of all believers to make disciples (Matthew 28:19) as they model commitment to Christ and teach others to obey God's Word. Every lay elder will be responsible for shepherding twenty to twenty-five households. Shepherding involves knowing, caring for, and spiritually guiding individuals and families within our church family. We expect attendance at all elders' meetings but understand that unforeseen circumstances may arise, and allowances will be made. Additionally, lay elders are tasked with overseeing various church functions, such as ministry teams, addressing doctrinal matters, initiating ministries, managing church discipline, and developing both short-term and long-term visions for the growth and health of our congregation. Through their commitment and accountability, lay elders play a crucial role in shaping the direction and spiritual health of our church family.

THE EXPECTATIONS OF STAFF ELDERS

The expectations of staff elders, referred to hereafter as pastors, will be all of those expectations outlined above for lay elders. Shepherding of families, oversight of ministries, and modeling of Christ's likeness are all required of the pastors as well as the lay elders. Our pastors give oversight to our church's strategic ministry action areas (Worship, Serve, Connect, and Give) as well as organizational areas (Lead, Executive, and Hispanic ministry). Each of these pastors provides direction and leadership to our church family and is responsible for leading the day-to-day operations of the church and its ministries.

THE ROLE OF LEAD PASTOR

The Lead Pastor is often referred to as the "first among equals." This idea is derived from the role of the apostle Peter among the twelve disciples of Jesus. This leadership is derived from both the congregation's recognition of his leadership and the natural influence given to the primary teaching pastor of the church. The Lead Pastor is not solely responsible for the shepherding or oversight of the church; those responsibilities are shared equally among all the elders. However, the Lead Pastor is responsible for steering the vision and teaching of the church, as well as giving oversight to the church staff. The church staff (including the pastors) work under the leadership of the Lead Pastor, and he is responsible for the oversight their ministries.

ELDER MEETINGS

The elders will regularly convene, typically once a month. The meetings will last for approximately two hours and will cover a time of worship, oversight, ministry evaluation, shepherding reports, and extended prayer for the church family. The Elder Chair (initially the Lead Pastor) will moderate the meeting, and another elder will serve as the secretary for recording minutes (initially the Connect Pastor). If the Elder Chair is not present at a meeting, the Executive Pastor will serve in that role. Every elder involved in shepherding is expected to attend, and invited church leaders may join for discussions. However, individuals seeking to participate must request permission beforehand. In addition to the regular meetings, an unscheduled meeting may be called by the Lead Pastor, Elder Chair, or by a majority of the elders. Decisions will be made by unanimous agreement on most issues. However, a supermajority will be necessary for business matters requiring a vote, such as suggested bylaw changes or budget approvals, with the majority vote prevailing.

CONFRONTING AN ELDER

According to 1 Timothy 5:19-22, the process for confronting an elder in sin involves careful consideration and adherence to biblical principles. First, accusations against an elder should only be entertained if they are supported by multiple witnesses or evidence. If someone has an accusation against an elder other than the Lead Pastor, this should be taken directly to the Lead Pastor. If the accusation is against the Lead Pastor, then the accusation should be taken to the Executive Pastor. In light of our brokenness, we must emphasize the importance of evaluating the accusations to make sure they are not based on hearsay or unfounded claims. However, the elders will take every accusation seriously and diligently investigate in accordance with the standards of God's Word. Secondly, the elders will address the issue directly with the individual involved, seeking repentance and restoration. However, if the elder persists in sin, he must be rebuked publicly as a warning to others, demonstrating the seriousness of the matter and upholding the standards set out for elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

THE DEACON TEAM

The deacon team is comprised of men chosen by the church to address the physical needs of the congregation and offer support to the elder team. Each deacon plays a crucial role, including leading or serving on various ministry teams. Alongside their regular duties, they rotate as the Deacon on Call, ready to assist whenever necessary. Working closely with the elder team, deacons ensure that families within the church receive the necessary support. Ministry teams like Benevolence and Hospital Visitation allow for targeted assistance where it's most needed. Furthermore, some deacons directly support an elder in shepherding their designated families, fostering a robust sense of community within the congregation.

CONGREGATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The congregation holds elders accountable through its governance structure, which emphasizes congregational accountability. The church governance is vested in the members and administered by the elder team and deacon team. The congregation exercises its authority through several key actions, including calling a member of the pastoral staff, affirming members of the elder team, and affirming members of the deacon team. This affirmation process ensures that elders and deacons are accountable to the congregation, reflecting the congregation's trust and support. Additionally, the congregation has authority over significant decisions such as adopting a budget, buying or selling property, borrowing money, and amending the constitution or bylaws. Lastly, church members can raise a concern about a decision made by the elders by approaching a current elder or by submitting a signed letter to the church office addressed to the elders; all concerns will be discussed by the elders. By holding elders accountable through these mechanisms, the congregation maintains an active role in the church's governance and ensures that leadership remains transparent, accountable, and aligned with the church's mission and values.

THE DECISION TO TRANSITION: MAY 15TH, 2024

Join us, as a church family, on Wednesday, May 15th, for a Members' Meeting. We'll engage in worship and address important business matters. At the forefront is a significant agenda item: transitioning our church governance from Senior Pastor led to elder-led, a topic under discussion for the past couple of years. The vote on this motion will occur via secret ballot without discussion. We urge you to prayerfully consider this decision and to share any concerns or questions with our pastoral staff before May 15th.

THE MOTION:

Motion: Transitioning First Baptist Church of Garner from Senior Pastor led to elder-led governance.

First Baptist Church of Garner recognizes the importance of shared leadership and collective wisdom in guiding the spiritual direction of the church and shepherding the flock of God; and acknowledges that a plurality of elders aligns with the Bible and its principles of plurality of leadership, accountability, and pastoral care as exemplified in the New Testament church; and after thorough examination and deliberation over the course of several years, it has been determined that transitioning to an elder-led governance structure would enhance the spiritual health, unity, and effectiveness of First Baptist Church of Garner.

Be it resolved that:

1. First Baptist Church of Garner hereby adopts an elder-led governance model, effective September 1st, 2024, whereby a team of elders, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in accordance with the teachings of Scripture, shall collectively oversee the spiritual and administrative affairs of the church.
2. The transition to an elder-led governance structure shall be implemented gradually and with careful consideration to ensure a smooth and seamless transition for the congregation.
3. The elder-led governance model shall be characterized by transparency, accountability, and servant leadership, with a commitment to seeking God's will and discerning His guidance in all matters pertaining to the church.
4. All members of First Baptist Church of Garner are encouraged to pray for wisdom, unity, and discernment as we transition, trusting in God's provision and guidance every step of the way.

This motion shall be presented to the congregation for consideration and approval at a Members' Meeting to be held on May 15th 2024, and upon approval, shall be implemented as outlined herein.

Submitted by: The Pastoral Staff and Deacon Officers Date: April 8th, 2024