

Philosophy of Leadership

Elders, Vocational Staff, Commissions, and Deacons

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The following principles reflect our attempt to follow scriptural principles related to leaders roles and relationships. However, the Bible does not clearly specify any one form of government. We also realize that many faithful Bible scholars have varying interpretations and resulting philosophies of leadership. We also believe that the Spirit of God allows us a certain flexibility and creativity, as expressed in this document.

It is vitally important that we all focus more on being Spirit-filled servants of Christ than subscribing to a particular model of leadership. It is no accident that Scripture clearly specifies the necessary character qualities of ministry leaders, while saying little as to what and how they are to organize themselves. If we allow him to, Satan can effectively infiltrate any system to bring dysfunction and disunity. Similarly, God's Spirit empowers humble servants to glorify Christ and bring fruitful results within nearly any form of government a church adopts.

Foremost in all our philosophy of leadership, is the conviction that Oakwood Community Church belongs to no human leader or group of leaders, but solely to the Lord Jesus Christ. We are all directly accountable to Him and must strive to obediently and lovingly follow His leadership.

The Constitution and By Laws of Oakwood Community Church state that Oakwood subscribes to a model of church leadership called "elder led." In

the "elder led" model, the elders set the overall ministry philosophy, values, goals, and priorities. Although the members elect the elders, the elders, rather than the membership as a whole, have oversight responsibility and accountability for the ministry of Oakwood. This does not mean that the elders make all the decisions, but that they are accountable to God and to the church for the decisions that are made.

The following summarizes the responsibility and accountability for ministry as it relates to the following relationships: elders & vocational staff; elders & commissions; and elders & deacons. While this document attempts to clarify the lines of authority, accountability, and empowerment, we pray that none of us will see our ministry in terms of turf, power, or legislation, but rather in terms of humble service to Christ for the welfare of His local body at Oakwood.

Elders relationship with staff

Because the elders are not able to personally conduct the variety of ministry programs and activities at Oakwood, they entrust the ministry to staff, who are charged to equip the membership for ministry. Specifically, the elders entrust this oversight of Oakwood's ministry to the Senior Pastor. As stated in the Constitution and By-laws, "The Senior Pastor of the Church shall have the oversight of the entire ministry of the Oakwood Community Church of Tampa, Inc." Although elected by the

Although elected by the membership, the Senior Pastor, is directly accountable to the collective ministry team of elders, and through the elders to the membership. In order to keep clear lines of accountability, all additional vocational staff are accountable to the Senior Pastor, and through him to the elders collectively.

The elders exercise their responsibility for the ministry of Oakwood by setting ministry philosophy, values, goals, and priorities. These then become the standard against which we can hold the Senior Pastor, and through him the staff, accountable for the ministry. Because we want to encourage innovation and creativity in implementing the ministry of Oakwood, we do not require that all ministry methods or programs receive elder approval. However, when innovation or creativity may impact the overall life or health of the church, the elders would like to be informed about what staff are considering.

Elders relationship with commissions

Many ministries at Oakwood do not require vocational staff, but can be conducted through volunteers. To conduct these ministries, the Oakwood elders employ a commission model. The commission model is derived from the principles seen in Acts 6. The apostles were the leaders of the Jerusalem church. A need arose regarding food distribution that concerned the apostles, but they could not fulfill both their apostolic role and serve food. The apostles proposed a general plan to the congregation, which was accepted. In the plan, the congregation selected a “commission” of seven men to decide upon and implement an equitable means of food distribution. The elders identified

identified the character qualifications of the “commission” members, the congregation chose the members, and the elders then entrusted this specific ministry task to the commission members. The “commission” was directly responsible to the elders, but the elders left the plan and its implementation up to the commission.

Based upon this passage, and for our purposes at Oakwood, we consider a commission to be a group of individuals to whom a ministry task has been entrusted. The elders will state the general nature of the ministry task, as well as the philosophy and values to guide the ministry. The elders will also state the parameters, or constraints, within which the commission will operate. The commission is then free to decide upon and implement the best course of action to implement the ministry, provided that the course of action is based on the philosophy of ministry and values and does not violate the constraints given. In this way, the commission can work in harmony with the leadership of the elders, yet be free to be creative and innovate in ministry.

The elders will entrust the ministry to a chair of the commission, who can then, in consultation with the elders, choose members of the commission. The chair serves at the will of the elders, not at the will of the commission members. The commission members serve the chair by offering their counsel and insight. If the elders lose confidence in the chair’s ability to appropriately lead the commission, the elders may replace the chair. A new chair may request new commission members.

For purposes of communication, encouragement, coordination, and general direction, the elders designate

one of their members (or a vocational staff member) to be a liaison with a particular commission chair. This elder is an ex-officio member of the commission (but not necessarily a regular attender of the meetings). He then periodically communicates to the elders how things are progressing with that particular commission's ministry.

The elders who have entrusted the ministry to the commission maintain final authority and responsibility for the ministry, but they will not intervene on minor issues. The elders will use their "veto power" sparingly. If a commission chair faces decisions in an area lacking clear parameters, the chair should consult with the elders, beginning with the liaison elder.

Elders relationship with deacons

The above principles pertaining to the relationship of the elders with commissions are applicable to the relationship of the elders with deacons as well. There are several additional comments that will be helpful to us. We ask all elders and deacons to regularly review our summary of the biblical character qualifications for elders and deacons [see, "Elder Qualification Descriptions, Evaluation & Recommendation Form" and "Deacon Character Descriptions, Evaluation & Recommendation Form"]. We must also use these biblical guidelines as we annually consider new potential elders and deacons. We also request that we all read Dr. John Vawter's teaching series: "The Biblical Descriptions of Elder and Deacon Roles."

Our by-laws state: "Working with fellow deacons, a deacon extends the over-seeing ministry of the elders to the physical needs of the congregation and property of the church. Under the elders'

elders' leadership, a deacon cares for and provides for the orderly administration of our fellowship. There shall be as many deacons as need require. Deacons may be male or female."

Although, as prescribed in the by-laws, the selection process for deacons is different from that of commission chairs, their accountability to the elders is the same. The deacons serve under the direction of the elders and not, like some forms of church government, as a separate but equal board where the elders have spiritual authority and deacons have financial authority. As with vocational staff and commissions, the elders set the values and parameters to guide the deacons' ministry. The elders occasionally will need to clarify or modify these values and parameters as Oakwood continues to grow.

The deacons are empowered to oversee their areas of responsibility as they deem best, provided they operate within the values and constraints the elders have given them. The elders maintain final authority and responsibility for the ministry, but they will not intervene on minor issues. The elders will use their "veto power" sparingly. If deacons face decisions in an area lacking clear parameters, they should consult with the elders. Elders do not want to stifle deacons initiative and innovation for greater effectiveness, they want to enhance it. In so doing, the deacons play a vital role in enabling elders to be free to concentrate on the ministry of the Word, prayer, visionary direction for the congregation, and shepherding oversight.

The deacons also administer Oakwood's finances. They see that our funds are carefully and properly

accounted for and distributed as prescribed by the budget. They monitor the financial health of the church relative to the budget, and income. They alert the combined board of elders and deacons if modifications to the budget may be necessary and or the congregation needs to be informed and challenged. The deacons also guide the budgeting process, with input from the elders, vocational staff and ministry leaders. Ministry leaders (elders, vocational staff, and volunteer staff) direct the ministry priorities not the financial overseers (deacons). If the total of the budgetary requests is greater than what the deacons deem is prudent, they will advise the elders. The elders will be the arbiters of setting funding priorities, after consulting with ministry leaders and deacons.

There may be occasions where the vision of the elders exceeds the faith and prudent concerns of the deacons (such as the timing of entering a building project, launching a daughter congregation, or adding an additional

vocational staff member). It is not rare for this to occur since there is a difference of focus due to roles. In such cases the vision of the elders shall be represented in the budget that is recommended to the congregation for their ratification. If the elders and deacons vary in judgment we need to defer to visionary faith. In a manner that is respectful to the elders and their vision, the deacons may inform the membership of the significant challenge they believe the budget presents. If the budget is approved by the congregation, the deacons are not responsible to bring in the funds to meet the budget. They will pray with the elders that God will supply to meet the needs of the vision. Deacons may also be involved in a financial stewardship emphasis. If the elders' vision is not funded (regardless of the presumption of the elders or disobedience of God's people), the deacons will alert the elders and, if necessary, assist them in informing the congregation or cutting the budget.

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