

The POLITY of Oakwood

We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer. Article 7, EFCA Statement of Faith

EXTERNAL GOVERNMENT – relation to other churches

A local church can relate to other churches in three basic ways:

EPISCOPAL – A bishop oversees the work of a number of churches and can make major decisions for the local church (e.g. Methodist, Catholic, and Episcopal churches).

PRESBYTERIAN – The congregation elects representatives, who, together with ordained clergy, compose a Presbytery. This Presbytery decides many policies for area local congregations (e.g., Presbyterian churches).

CONGREGATIONAL – Each local congregation governs itself under the direct leadership of Jesus Christ. If it is part of a denomination, local churches send representatives to conventions that develop policies that each local church may choose to adopt.

	EPISCOPAL	PRESBYTERIAN	CONGREGATIONAL
AUTHORITY:	BISHOP	CONGREGATION	CONGREGATION
↓	↓	↓	↓
DETERMINES:	MINISTRIES & PROGRAMS	PRESBYTERY	MINISTRIES & PROGRAMS
↓	↓	↓	↓
IMPACTS:	CONGREGATION	MINISTRIES & PROGRAMS	(DENOMINATION)

Oakwood Community Church is a member of the Evangelical Free Church of America. This denomination consists of autonomous churches united by their common statement of faith and ministry philosophy. They voluntarily place themselves in a relationship accountable to one another.

Oakwood sends representatives to district and national conferences of the denomination and supports the various ministries of the EFCA. Nevertheless, the members of Oakwood approve the church by-laws and determine the Lord's leading in local ministry, mission, and focus.

INTERNAL GOVERNMENT – local administrative leadership

There are also three basic ways a local church can be governed internally. Each has scriptural principles to support its approach. Each also has its advantages and disadvantages. Both Satan and the Holy Spirit can work through all three. The primary interest of the New Testament is in the Spirit-directed life and mission of the church, not in its form of government.

ELDER RULED -- The elder board, which is appointed by the existing elder board, is responsible for the affairs of the church and is not directly accountable to the members of the congregation (e.g., Episcopal, Presbyterian and some independent Bible churches).

ELDER LED -- The congregation elects elders and staff to provide them with guidance and direction. While members follow the elders, the elders are ultimately accountable to them. The congregation has a voice and right of approval on major issues. This is a blend of elder rule and democratic forms of government (e.g., some Evangelical Free churches).

DEMOCRATIC -- The congregation establishes ministry and policy on most issues, while electing a board or church staff to manage the ministries and routine affairs of the church. (e.g., Congregational, Baptist, some independent churches, some Evangelical Free churches).

	ELDER RULED	ELDER LED	DEMOCRATIC
AUTHORITY: ↓	ELDER BOARD ↓	CONGREGATION ↓	CONGREGATION ↓
DETERMINES: ↓	MINISTRIES & PROGRAMS ↓	ELDERS & STAFF ↓	MINISTRIES & PROGRAMS ↓
IMPACTS:	CONGREGATION	MINISTRIES & PROGRAMS	CHURCH BOARD

Oakwood has an **ELDER LED** form of internal government. The members entrust the human leadership of the church to the guidance and direction of the **senior pastor** and **elders** (limited to qualified males). Oakwood is **not elder-ruled**, since authority ultimately rests with the congregation – under the Lord’s direction – not with the elders or staff. The **members** affirm elders by vote and hold them accountable for their character, doctrine, and leadership.

The members also affirm **deacons** (both male and female) by vote. Under the elder’s leadership, deacons provide for the orderly administration of the physical needs of our congregation.

The church by-laws establish terms of service for the elders and deacons (three and two years, respectively). The by-laws set forth their qualifications, responsibilities, and means to cancel their service. Elders and deacons are limited to a maximum of six years of service with at least one year intervening before they may potentially be returned by congregational vote to the ministry.

The senior pastor is one of the elders. However, he does not have a set term of service. He is responsible to give oversight leadership to the entire ministry of Oakwood. Ministerial-vocational staff are directly accountable to the senior pastor and (through the senior pastor) to the elders. Like the senior pastor, they have no set term of service. The by-laws specify their qualifications, obligations, and responsibilities. The elders, senior pastor, and ministerial staff, commission other members to give leadership to various areas of ministry.