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CHURCH TRANSITION TO PLURALITY OF ELDERS:
A CASE STUDY

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CHURCH TRANSITION TO PLURALITY OF ELDERS:
A CASE STUDY

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PREFACE

When writing this dissertation, I frequently felt a sense of loneliness. The same has sometimes been true in ministry leadership. Both endeavors can feel isolated at times. The truth, however, is that I am not and was never alone. The Lord has blessed me with people in my life that have helped me learn and grow in many ways. I am thankful to those who have helped me mature in ministry, in school, as a husband and father, and as a man of God.

Thank you to Highland Baptist, Sycamore Creek Church, and Veritas where I practiced leadership and learned how to work with and for people. Thanks for putting up with my sometimes crazy ideas and understanding my need to explore different possibilities. I am also thankful to First Baptist Waverly for teaching me what it meant to follow Christ as a child, building me up and sending me out, only to have me return a couple of decades later. Thank you for agreeing to be the subject of this work, but much more than that for being a constant source of encouragement and for desiring to reach the world for Christ.

I am thankful to Southern Seminary for being a beacon of academic rigor and passion for the Word of God. I have learned so much from some of the best professors in the world, not just what to think, but how to think. I have always been proud to say that I am a graduate of Southern. I am thankful for Dr. Michael Wilder's mentorship, friendship, and fellow burden for church leadership and am so grateful that God brought him into my life.

I am thankful for my family. I am truly blessed. I am thankful for godly parents who brought me up to seek after the things of God. I am thankful for brothers and in-laws who have both challenged me and cheered me on. Words cannot express my thankfulness

for my wife, her unconditional love and support throughout all of our marriage, but especially through the sometimes frustrating pursuit of this academic degree. I could not have done it without her. I thank God for our three beautiful daughters, Hannah, Rachel, and Emma, and know that they are looking forward to a little more daddy time.

God has graciously and mercifully blessed me beyond what I deserve by putting these people in my life. But more than any of them, I am thankful for Jesus. I am blessed to have called Him my savior at an early age and every year I understand a little more about what that actually means. I pray that my life—my ministry, my academic work, my family—will all bring glory to him.

Josh Remy

Waverly, Ohio

December 2019

CHAPTER 1

RESEARCH CONCERN

The New Testament church provides a model of plural leadership by a small group of men called elders.¹ However, this is not a universal model in evangelical churches today, including churches in the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). Recently, some Southern Baptist churches have decided to make a transition to a plural elder model. Some scholarly work (including work from Southern Baptist scholars)² on the biblical basis for this church leadership model has helped to motivate churches to make a transition. However, insufficient research has been done on the methods and results of such transitions. Churches wishing to make a transition to a plurality of elders in the future would be greatly served with more information about best practices and potential challenges.

Research Problem

In every local body of believers featured in the New Testament there exists a leadership structure of plural leadership over the local church.³ Wayne Grudem says that when referring to this group at each locale, the New Testament writers most often use the

¹ Many scholars, even those opposed to a plural elder model, acknowledge that the New Testament churches most commonly reveal plural elder leadership. This issue is covered in more depth in chap. 2.

² A few examples of prominent Southern Baptist advocates for a plurality of elders include Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington, DC, and president of 9Marks; Benjamin Merkle, associate professor of New Testament and Greek at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary; and Phil Newton, pastor of South Woods Baptist Church in Memphis, TN.

³ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, rev. and exp ed. (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995), 104.

term “elders.”⁴ However, the typical model of a Southern Baptist church today does not reflect this biblical leadership paradigm. Grudem adds that the most common church polity in SBC churches is a congregational government with a single elder, usually given the title “senior pastor.”⁵ He notes that the pastor may or may not exert a high degree of authority over the congregation (depending on tenure, leadership style, and influence of others in the congregation) but most often possesses the principal responsibility of accomplishing the church’s mission.⁶

Various authors have argued that a change to shared leadership, such as that of plural elders, can have great benefits to both the pastor and congregation. Shared leadership could help alleviate pastoral burnout by distributing the primary responsibility among several individuals and making congregational expectations of leadership more realistic.⁷ A plurality of elders provides accountability to protect the pastor and church from an individual pastor’s potentially poor organizational decisions and builds maturity through protection and rebuke for poor personal choices as well.⁸ The church also can become more effective as various leaders share their gifts in a complementary fashion to help guide the church.⁹ Perhaps the most compelling benefit for a plurality of elders,

⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 912.

⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 928.

⁶ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 928.

⁷ George Barna, *The Power of Team Leadership: Achieving Success through Shared Responsibility* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2001), 1-9.

⁸ Benjamin L. Merkle, *Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 60.

⁹ Mark E. Dever, *A Display of God’s Glory: Basics of Church Structure* (Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 24.

however, is that it is the structure seen in the New Testament and matching this structure helps a church stay true to Scripture.¹⁰

Over the last twenty years or so, a number of SBC churches have attempted a change to a government that includes, in one form or another, a plurality of elders.¹¹ In his 2002 dissertation on this phenomenon, Robert Wring quotes several prominent SBC figures, including Gray Allison, Paige Patterson, and James Draper, Jr., as predicting the following decade would see many more SBC congregations moving to elder rule and that it would be an issue of great controversy.¹² Now almost two decades removed from those predictions, it is still unclear the scope of this trend in the SBC. Though definite numbers are not known, churches have certainly attempted the transition. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that some churches have made a successful transition, such as Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, DC,¹³ while other churches have failed at such a transition, such as Germantown Baptist Church near Memphis, Tennessee.¹⁴ After taking his own church through such a process, Phil Newton notes,

During the past dozen years a number of Baptist churches have adopted plural eldership in one form or another—although not all did so smoothly. Some churches have split over the issue because of the strong feelings and fears of jettisoning the

¹⁰ James White, “The Plural Elder-Led Church,” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: B & H, 2004), 255-56.

¹¹ Exact numbers cannot currently be found on how many SBC churches have made a transition to a plural elder model. In a 2006 article, Hannah Elliott references Clark Finch, a leading opponent of elder rule in Germantown Baptist, in stating that 1 percent of the then 42,000 SBC congregations had some form of elder rule, but no she gave source to back up that number. Part of the benefit of this proposed research would be a better understanding of the frequency of this trend. Hannah Elliott, “Elder Rule Increasing in Baptist Life, and So Is Controversy over Role,” *Associated Baptist Press*, May 2006, accessed November 29, 2011, http://www.abpnews.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1112&Itemid=119.

¹² Robert Wring, “An Examination of the Practice of Elder Rule in Selected Southern Baptist Churches in the Light of New Testament Teaching” (PhD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 94-106.

¹³ Phil A. Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 121.

¹⁴ Elliott, “Elder Rule Increasing in Baptist Life.”

cherished Baptist practice of congregationalism. Pastors have even been dismissed or barred from the fellowship of their local associations over eldership.¹⁵

Many pastors or congregations may desire a change to a plural elder model but do not know where to begin.¹⁶ Much of this uncertainty is due to the very nature of change in the church. Difficulties in transitioning to a new leadership model may not be caused by a lack of support for plural elders, but because there were mistakes made in the change process. An unsuccessful change may be a result, not of a lack of biblical knowledge or qualified men, but of a fear of change.¹⁷

The significance of this current study is to provide a close-up example of a traditional Southern Baptist congregation that voted to change its church government to include a plurality of elders. First Baptist Church of Waverly, Ohio, officially made the change in church polity in August 2017. Since then, the church has been led by a group of men called elders. This case study looks at the topic of plural elders in an SBC church while also reviewing change methods in organizations like a church.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to examine the transition of a local Southern Baptist church from a single elder model to a plural elder model to discover factors and trends that will help educate other churches wanting to make a similar transition.

Delimitations of the Proposed Research

While examining arguments for the plural elder-led model in the literature review, the research itself does not necessarily make an argument for or against an elder-led model. The research simply explains how a transition can be made to such a model.

¹⁵ Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 56.

¹⁶ Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 192.

¹⁷ Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, 188.

The results of the research may make a value judgment about various transition methods or results but does not necessarily extend those to the overall argument for or against the plural elder-led model.

Necessary historical study is covered in the literature review, but the research does not aim to contribute to the knowledge base on the history of church polity. The results of this research are primarily intended to be used as an example for churches desiring a transition to a plural elder model, not to provide a historical outline. As such, the past is studied only to inform the present.

Research Questions

The principal question of the study is “How did this particular church make the transition to plurality of elders?” The following research questions helped to guide the study:

1. How did this particular church plan, design, and communicate its transition to a plurality of elders?
2. What factors, if any, influenced people in the church to favor such a transition?
3. What factors, if any, influenced people in the church to oppose such a transition?
4. How well did the prescribed methods of change work for this transition in this particular church?
5. What has changed in this particular church after its transition to plurality of elders?

Terminology and Definitions

Authority. The freedom to decide or right to act without hindrance and the power to carry out the decisions.¹⁸ For the local church, this includes the ability to make

¹⁸ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 46.

decisions, develop strategies, and influence direction. Ideally, the *authority* should be both formal (documented and official) and real (actual influence).¹⁹

Church. English translation of the Greek εκκλησια. A local gathering of believers for the purposes of worship, service, fellowship, edification, and outreach. Most often referred to as a gathering rather than a physical organization in the Scriptures.²⁰

Congregational government. Form of church governance in which final human authority rests with the local congregation.²¹ Typically, every member of the church shares in authority through the democratic process. Many believe this type of government can coexist with both single elder models and plural elder models.²² However, it is debated whether congregational church polity must be purely democratic or if it can coexist with plural elders as a type of representative government.²³ In single elder congregational models, one individual retains strategic authority and responsibility even though the church votes on most matters. In plural elder congregational models, the council of elders holds a high degree of authority and responsibility over the church, but they may be elected, giving the congregation the ultimate authority.²⁴

Elder. English translation of the Greek πρεσβύτερος. Synonymous with overseer, bishop, pastor. Refers to a leader in a local church and highlights experience,

¹⁹ Philippe Aghion and Jean Tirole, “Formal and Real Authority in organizations,” *Journal of Political Economy* 105 (1997): 1-29.

²⁰ J. D. Douglas, ed., *The Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, IL: Inter-Varsity/Tyndale House, 1980), 283.

²¹ James Leo Garrett, Jr., “The Congregation-Led Church,” in Brand and Norman, *Perspectives on Church Government*, 157.

²² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 928-36. Both single-elder and plural-elder congregational models are discussed in chap. 2.

²³ Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman, introduction to Brand and Norman, *Perspectives on Church Government*, 21.

²⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 928-36.

maturity, and influence.²⁵ For the purposes of this study, an elder is seen as a formal office of the church marked by congregational approval or public recognition.²⁶

Plural elder model. A model of church government in which both the responsibility and authority for the church is shared among a small group of leaders. Such a model could exist in several forms.²⁷ The groups could be completely equal with little to no distinction in visibility or pay. A point person may exist on the team that could hold the title of pastor, senior pastor, or lead pastor, but by definition his authority and responsibility are shared.²⁸ A church with this model could be considered “elder-led” if the congregation stills votes on major issues or “elder-governed” if the congregation only elects or approves the elders, then leaves authority for all other decisions in their hands.²⁹

Responsibility. The expectation to implement decisions, strategies, and direction for the benefit of the local church body.³⁰

Single elder model. A model of church government in which only one individual possesses the responsibility for leading the entire church. The authority this elder has varies greatly from church to church.³¹ For this study limited a single SBC church, the single elder model will also be congregational in nature. This single elder is often expected to set the vision and do the majority of the preaching and teaching.³²

²⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 912-18.

²⁶ Dever, *A Display of God's Glory*, 25.

²⁷ Samuel E. Waldron, “Plural Elder Congregationalism,” in *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 192.

²⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 932-35.

²⁹ Wring, “An Examination of the Practice of Elder Rule,” 106.

³⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 905.

³¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 928.

³² Merkle, *40 Questions*, 28.

Commonly, the single elder is given the title of pastor, senior pastor, or lead pastor.³³ Some have considered a single elder (pastor) with multiple staff similar to a plural elder model.³⁴ However, a senior pastor in this situation is often in control and the staff lacks mutual accountability.³⁵ Additionally, there has not been congregational approval in order to formalize a distributed authority. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the multiple staff situation is not equated with plural elders and is instead considered a single elder model.³⁶

Procedural Overview

The case study follows First Baptist's transition to plurality of elders chronologically while using several different research methods. The research looks at the history of the church, the planning of the transition, and the announcement of the transition and educating of the congregation, followed by the approval to make the change, the selection of the new elders, and finally, the results and perceived differences over the two years since the transition. Information was gathered using surveys, interviews, document analysis, and the researcher's observations. The research methodology is explained more in chapter 3 and the analysis of the information collected in chapters 4 and 5.

Research Assumptions

For the purposes of this study, the following assumptions are made:

1. It is possible to evaluate the effectiveness, and thereby the success or failure of a transition, of a church through measuring various participation levels and subjective attitudes and opinions.
2. The leaders and members of a congregation can effectively remember and explain the

³³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 928-32.

³⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 928-32.

³⁵ Daniel Akin, "The Single Elder-Led Church," in Brand and Norman, *Perspectives on Church Government*, 68.

³⁶ Steven B. Cowan, introduction to Cowan, *Who Runs the Church?*, 14-15.

qualitative conditions of a transition that occurred two years prior.

Conclusion for Proposed Research

As more churches attempt to change their leadership model to include a plurality of elders, this study seeks to discover the results of one such transition. The research examines multiple factors before, during, and after this transition and compare those results to the precedent literature in both the practical theology of plural elders and the wisdom of organizational change. The following chapter surveys the existing literature on these topics to understand the motives and methods for a church making a change in its leadership structure.

CHAPTER 2

PRECEDENT LITERATURE

While little work has been done specifically on the *transitions* to plural elder leadership, there is plenty of precedent literature on the issue of plural eldership in the church. Even more has been written on the nature and challenges of organizational change. This chapter examines these topics to inform the study of church transitions to a plurality of elders.¹ First, the biblical and historical foundations for a plurality of elders are examined. As the timeline draws closer to the present, Baptist history, and more narrowly Southern Baptist history as it relates to plurality of elders, will be highlighted. Modern expressions of church polity, centering on single elder versus plural elder congregationalism will then be explained, including current arguments for and against using plural elders in a local congregation. Then, the plural elder model will be examined in greater detail, including the structures, responsibilities, qualifications, and appointment of this polity. Finally, an overview of work in the field of organizational change, specifically change in the church, will be reviewed. This chapter surveys the issues churches will face when making this transition. The goal is an understanding of the structures of plural elder government and the expected motives, methods, challenges, and benefits that could be seen in a church transition that is then examined in the research portion of the dissertation.

¹ The scope and direction of this chapter has been set as a result of having no previous empirical studies on such transitions in SBC life. Scholarly works exist regarding a plurality of elders in Baptist churches on both sides of the argument (Wring and Merkle both wrote PhD dissertations on the matter) and many Doctor of Ministry projects apply change principles to various other transitions in the church, but no scholarly work has been done on this specific subject. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to lay the groundwork for understanding such a change.

Biblical History of the Term and Office of “Elder”

To fully understand models of plural elder leadership, one must first recognize the biblical foundations of this type of government. A biblical survey demonstrates that eldership was both a form of official representative government and a loose concept of leadership based on age and experience. Beginning in Acts and the epistles, the early church is described as having a similar type of leadership. Building on the example of Old Testament community leadership, the New Testament church demonstrates a consistent pattern of plural eldership at each local church.²

Elders in Israel

The term *elder* has its root in the Old Testament with the leadership of the tribes of Israel. זקן is the Hebrew word translated as the English *elder*.³ Throughout the Old Testament, the word can be used interchangeably to refer to age and the leadership of the nation of Israel and surrounding nations.⁴ Of the 178 occurrences of זקן in the Old Testament, one third of them simply mean “old,” while the majority refer to an office of leadership on a committee representing a specific defined social community.⁵ This group of men had acquired knowledge and wisdom thereby gaining the respect of their

² David A. Mappes, “The ‘Elder’ in the Old and New Testaments,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154, no. 613 (January 1997): 80-92.

³ The word זקן is derived from the root noun translated as “beard.” Therefore, its most basic definition is a man with a beard, perhaps an adult male in general. Only on five occasions does the word or one of its forms refer specifically to females (Gen 18:13; 24:36, Zech 8:4, Prov 23:22, Ruth 1:12). Paris J. Conrad, “זקן,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 4:122.

⁴ Benjamin L. Merkle, “The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000), 27.

⁵ זקן in the sense of leadership is almost always coupled with a genitive clause (or a genitive phrase already mentioned in the context), most often elders of Israel or elders of the city. Therefore, it is always clearly defined who these particular elders represent. Conrad contends that these elders should be seen as holders of an office rather than representatives of a particular age. There is clear linguistic distinction between an older man and the holder of the office of elder. Conrad, “זקן,” 4:123.

community or group.⁶ Because they ruled collectively, the word in reference to leadership is almost always found in the plural.⁷ This type of leadership was not unique to Israel at the time. Elders were also seen in Egypt, Midian, and Moab.⁸ This system of government most likely finds its origins in the times of nomadic tribes, then progressed in other cultures as it did in Israel, toward a slightly different function with the rise of centralized monarchies.⁹

The first Old Testament appearance of elders is in Jacob's funeral procession in Genesis 50:7.¹⁰ The reference is not necessarily to men of old age, but to leadership in the houses of Jacob and Pharaoh. This usage continues into Exodus as Moses meets with the elders of Israel and accompanies them to Pharaoh to demand release.¹¹ As the giving of the Law unfolds, elders can be seen frequently with Moses and are consistently given the responsibility of carrying out aspects of the Law.¹² Of the 178 times זקני is used, 34 of

⁶ Timothy M. Wills, "Elders in the OT," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Katharine Doob Sakenfeld (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 234.

⁷ Benjamin L Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 62.

⁸ R. S. Wallace, "Elders," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 369.

⁹ Conrad, "זקני," 126-27.

¹⁰ Gen 50:7-8 reads, "So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father's household; they left only their little ones and their flocks and their herds in the land of Goshen." All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.

¹¹ Victor P. Hamilton notes the mere fact that an enslaved Israel had elders suggests there was some degree of organized government. Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 66.

¹² Conrad, "זקני," 128. Throughout Deuteronomy, the elders are charged with making decisions in local legal matters.

them appear in the book of Exodus as Israel is becoming a nation.¹³ Throughout the wilderness period, the elders are seen eating and drinking before the Lord with Joshua and Moses. They are not so much forming the law as they are learning it. The elders were then commissioned to take the laws to the people of Israel.¹⁴ As the land is settled, the elders continue to serve as representative leadership with Joshua and into the period of the Judges. They regularly took part in making decisions in judgments of the law in particular cases.¹⁵

The elders were the ones in 1 Samuel 8 shown asking Samuel to anoint a king for them to lead all of Israel. Once the monarchy was established, their role changed slightly in an apparent loss of some authority. Moses, Joshua, the judges, and Samuel had not ruled as kings, but instead frequently shared leadership execution among the elders of Israel. This request for a king would fundamentally change the leadership structure of Israel.¹⁶ Political sovereignty would pass from the people of Israel (through the leadership of elders) to the king.¹⁷

The elders of Israel remained influential up to and throughout the time of the exile. Lamentations and Ezekiel both prophesied either to or regarding the elders (Lam 1:19, 2:10, 4:16, 5:12, 14; Ezek 8:11, 12, 9:6). Being consistently local and present leadership, the elders most likely played an incredibly important role in seeing the nation

¹³ Warren Baker and Eugene E. Carpenter, eds., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 2003), 300-301.

¹⁴ Wills, "Elders in the OT," 234.

¹⁵ T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 516-18.

¹⁶ Though it will not be done in this dissertation, one could argue that Christ's reign as King delivers once and for all on this request for a monarchy and therefore returns to a theocracy-like leadership structure in the church including plural elders as representative leadership under the authority of King Jesus.

¹⁷ David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 248.

through the time of captivity. Though not the heroes of the story, elders can also be seen helping Ezra lead in the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 5:5,9; 6:7,8,14).

In the times of the second Temple, the synagogue was the most central part of Jewish life. There, elders are again seen leading the people of Israel, now functioning to oversee the well-being of Jewish communities. The Septuagint most often translates the Hebrew זקן into the Greek πρεσβύτερος.¹⁸ The Old Testament concept of elders continues through the intertestamental period on into the time of the gospels. Along with the chief priests, Pharisees, and scribes, they helped comprise Jesus' chief group of critics while on earth. When the time comes for the new church to begin, the principal officers are given the title "elders."¹⁹

Elders in the New Testament Church

Acts 11:30 is a pivotal verse in this history. It is the first time πρεσβύτερος is used to describe leaders in a Christian church.²⁰ Until this point, *elders* had referred to the Jewish leadership, often painted as rivals of this new Christian movement as they had also rivaled Christ.²¹ However, in this passage, the church in Antioch is sending an offering

¹⁸ Conrad, "זקן," 4:124.

¹⁹ A. E. Harvey argues that it was only the name borrowed from Jewish roots. The New Testament structure, he asserts, cannot be attributed to the Sanhedrin or the Synagogue. A. E. Harvey, "Elders," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 25, no. 2 (1974): 318-32. Similarly, David Miller contends that though the terminology "elder" is used, the structure of the New Testament church was unique to both its Jewish roots and its Roman and Greek setting. He believes this uniqueness is evidence that the church structure was a prescriptive model for churches today. David W. Miller, "The Uniqueness of New Testament Church Eldership," *Grace Theological Journal* 6, no. 2 (1985): 315-27. James Hamilton, Jr., agrees with this assessment and sees little to no similarity between the structure of Old Testament and synagogue elders and the elders of the New Testament church. Instead, he sees more similarities with Old Testament's suffering righteous shepherds. Only the term "elder" is borrowed. James Hamilton says, "The most superficial examination shows that the early church adopted a term widely employed in their social environment." James Hamilton, Jr., "Did the Church Borrow Leadership Structures from the Old Testament of Synagogue?" in *Shepherding God's Flock*, ed. Ben Merkle and Thomas Schreiner (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 22.

²⁰ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 63.

²¹ Collins, "Elders in the NT," 232. Up until this point in Acts, the group identified as the elders had continued their persecution of Jesus' church. Acts 4:5, 8, 23, 6:12 all demonstrate the elders'

with Paul and Barnabas to “the elders.” The passage does not indicate who these people are.²² Further study of the context reveals that it was for relief of the famine in Jerusalem and it is received by the elders of that church. It is clear that *elders* is referring not to the Jewish leadership, but to Christian leadership. Thus begins an additional use to the word *elder* that will be repeated throughout the remainder of the New Testament. With no further description of the office or role introduced, the reader is left to assume that, in some way, this office in the Christian church resembles that of the role in Jewish culture.²³

In Acts 14:21-26, Luke records Paul and Barnabas’ return to Antioch from their first missionary journey. On the way home, they passed through Lystra, Iconium, and Pisidian Antioch and verse 23 records that they “appointed elders for them in every church.” Paul and Barnabas were establishing a leadership structure in each of the churches they had founded along the way. There is no record of how these leaders were elected (other than to say Paul and Barnabas appointed them).²⁴ Nor is there a definite description of their role, but it is clear that there was more than one at each church.²⁵

Further in Acts, there are several more instances of the Jerusalem Elders providing leadership. The most prominent example is in Acts 15, which is a relatively

role in instigating such persecution. Even after the use of the term to refer to Christian leadership, Jewish elders can be seen trying to have Paul killed (Acts 23:14,24:1, 25:15).

²² Ben Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 374.

²³ Some dispute continues on whether or not the position of elder is actually an office. It is possible that “elder” was simply a basic term for those who had influence within the tribes and nation of Israel—a generic term for leader. It is also possible that the New Testament term *elder* is simply referring to an individual with influence among the congregation. See Alastair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 6-7.

²⁴ Bruce comments that the Greek χειροτονεο, here in Acts 14:23 translated as “appoint,” originally meant “to elect by a show of hands,” it came to be used as “designate” or “appoint.” F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1951), 286.

²⁵ James White, “The Plural Elder-Led Church,” in *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, ed. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman (Nashville: B & H, 2004), 271.

troublesome passage when it comes to church government. All four major types of church polity (listed later) claim this passage.²⁶ The Jerusalem church had multiple elders, but James seems to have played a prominent role. It seems that they not only led the local church but also had at least some influence over other congregations, including what Paul was doing on the mission field. After consulting with them on Jewish traditions that the Gentile congregations were required to uphold, Paul carries their judgment to the churches he is supporting.

Returning to Jerusalem from his third missionary journey, Paul stops at the coastal town of Miletus and sends for the leadership of the church in Ephesus for a heartfelt farewell. In Acts 20:17, he calls for the elders of the church, reminisces about his work with them, and then includes the following charge in his address in verse 28: “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.” In this farewell, Luke records two more pieces of terminology that can be later seen in the epistles. In outlining a role description of the elders, albeit brief, Paul calls them “overseers” (ἐπίσκοπος) and charges them to “shepherd” (ποιμαίνω) their congregation.²⁷ This address of Paul is one key piece of evidence that the offices of elder (πρεσβύτερος),

²⁶ In Brand and Norman, *Perspectives on Church Government*, White discusses the claim by hierarchical polity advocates (White, “The Plural Elder-Led Church,” 265), while Akin cites James as a model for single elder (Daniel Akin, “The Single Elder-Led Church,” 67), and Reymond uses Acts 15 to support Presbyterian polity (Robert L. Reymond, “The Presbytery-led Church,” 98). Merkle uses the passage in discussing a plurality of elders (Merkle, *40 Questions*, 31).

²⁷ Both ἐπίσκοπος and ποιμήν and their verb forms are used relatively infrequently in the NT, but form the basis for popular modern titles for the office of elder—bishop and pastor, respectively. The two are interrelated in their metaphoric connection to shepherding. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:615. ἐπίσκοπος is used a total of 5 times as a noun. Once it refers to Christ in 1 Pet 2:25. The remaining 4 occurrences refer to church overseers in Acts 20:28 during Paul’s farewell to the Ephesian elders, Phil 1:1 in the greeting to that church, and 1 Tim 3:1 and Titus 1:7 as Paul outlines the character requirements for overseers. The noun ποιμήν only occurs once in the NT in reference to church leadership in Eph 4:11 in the list of leadership gifts given to the church. Kittel, Bromiley, and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 6:497.

overseer (ἐπίσκοπος), and pastor (ποιμήν) are used interchangeably by the apostles and represent one church office.²⁸ Based on the use of these synonyms, several of Paul’s specific letters to churches bear further evidence of plural elders. For example, Philippians begins with a greeting to “all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons” (Phil 1:1). This use of the plural form of overseer while the letter is written to a singular church is very clear evidence that Paul named multiple leaders at Philippi.²⁹ Furthermore, he does not call out a singular leader but instead addresses the letter to the group of overseers and deacons.

The pastoral epistles contain greater evidence of the role of elder. In 1 Timothy, Paul gives qualifications for an individual being considered as an overseer (3:1-7). He then tells Timothy in 5:17 that “elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.”³⁰ Paul also writes about elders to Titus on the island of Crete in Titus 1:5-9:

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

²⁸ Merkle’s focus is to demonstrate that these are indeed synonymous. Merkle, “The Elder and Overseer,” 156. See also Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995), 31-34; David Mappes, “The New Testament Elder, Overseer, and Pastor,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154, no. 614 (April 1997): 164; Phil A. Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 46-50; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 913. These authors agree that the three words are interchangeable within the New Testament.

²⁹ In commenting on the plurality of this greeting, Gordon Fee asserts that no evidence exists for a single leader as the head of this local assembly or any other Pauline church. Gordon Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, *Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 67.

³⁰ Because of the responsibilities listed, Knight contends that these elders are to be seen as church officers and not just older men. George Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 231.

Paul speaks of *elders* in the plural, but uses the term *overseer* in the singular. He is speaking of an individual member of the group. He has not switched offices, but is still discussing elders. The sense of this passage is clearly a group of leaders in each church. It also continues to build the description of the elders' responsibility, including tasks of oversight and education.

The general epistles record evidence of elders as well. James tells Christians to go to the elders of the church when sick so that they might pray over them (Jas 5:14), both acknowledging that there should be more than one and outlining one of their responsibilities.³¹ In 1 Peter 5:1-3, Peter writes,

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

Peter uses basically the same three Greek words that Luke recorded Paul saying in his farewell address to the leaders in Ephesus: elders, oversight, and shepherd, further building the case for these being synonymous in the local church.³² He also gives an example of a general job description of this particular office: they are to oversee and provide examples to the flock. He is clear to define the authority of the elders as ones who are to operate according to the will of God, not for ulterior motives. Though it is not as clear as other passages, Peter also seems to be in favor of a plurality of elders as he addresses them in the plural while presumably thinking of an individual church.³³

³¹ Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 193.

³² John H. Elliott, "Elders as Leaders in 1 Peter and the Early Church," *Hervorm Theological Studies* 64, no. 2 (2008): 681-95.

³³ John MacArthur, *Answering the Key Questions about Elders* (Los Angeles: Word of Grace Communications, 1984), 5.

A biblical overview of the term *elder* reveals a position of leadership with great importance and influence. Throughout the Old Testament the term referred to family and community leaders and it was this concept on which the idea of church elders was built. While their appointment and specific functions are not spelled out, it is clear that they led as a plurality. In the New Testament, there is witness to the churches in Jerusalem, Antioch in Syria, Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, churches on the island of Crete, churches being addressed in Hebrews, James, and 1 Peter all having multiple elders in the congregation, while there is no clear mention of a single elder-led congregation.³⁴

The Biblical Description and Role of an Elder

Many common characteristics can be seen throughout the biblical history of this leadership position. This section describes some of those characteristics.

Plural. The first common characteristic worthy of note is the consistent plurality. Though the patriarchal elder must have at some level been singular when overseeing only his own family, in terms of the covenant community, elders were almost always mentioned in the plural.³⁵ In their earliest appearance, they were a group giving ruling assistance to Moses. While elders are frequently referred to with the number 70, the size of the group was never clear and probably changed from situation to situation.³⁶ Similarly, in the New Testament church, elders were always referred to in the plural,

³⁴ Samuel E. Waldron, "Plural Elder Congregationalism," in *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 212. Multiple elders are referenced in each of these churches: Jerusalem (Acts 11:30), Antioch in Syria (Acts 13:1), Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch (Acts 14:23), Ephesus (Acts 20:17), Philippi (Phil 1:1), the churches on Crete (Titus 1:5), the churches addressed by Hebrews (Heb 13:7, 17, 24), James (Jas 5:14), and Peter (1 Pet 5:1-2).

³⁵ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 61.

³⁶ Alexander and Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 516-18.

though the exact number is never made clear. In either case, plurality existed to spread out both authority and responsibility.

Shepherds of the people. The elders' ultimate responsibility was the well-being of the people entrusted to their care. From the beginning, leadership was in place to ensure that the people were treated fairly and were well represented within the government.³⁷ The Greek word ποιμήν, meaning "shepherd" demonstrates that this characteristic remained for New Testament elders in the church.

Spiritual authority. The Old Testament elders were clearly a judicial body.³⁸ They were given the authority to lead the people and carry out the judgments of God within the Covenant community of Israel. This authority did not necessarily come from a title since the group seems to have been an ad hoc assembly for much of Israel's history. Instead, the root of their authority came from an already established relationship within the community. Similarly, early church elders were selected from within the congregation and therefore had some degree of pre-existing authority.³⁹ They were called to use this authority in the church and the congregation was challenged to follow their leadership.

Men of character. Elders in ancient and even second Temple Israel had certain character expectations placed upon them. Though these moral qualities have not been listed, general expectations included wisdom, hospitality, generosity, fairness, persuasive abilities, knowledge, and uprightness were all expected from Old Testament elders.⁴⁰

³⁷ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1995), 111.

³⁸ John L. McKenzie, "The Elders in the Old Testament," *Biblica* 40, no. 2 (1959): 526.

³⁹ This pre-existing authority may be an important distinction in a transition to a plurality of elders. If instead of or along with acknowledging elders from within the congregation, an outside elder is also hired or there is a relatively new pastor (neither of which have built trust with the congregation), it could introduce a degree of suspicion and sabotage the transition. Eldership seems to build on already established leadership.

⁴⁰ Mappes, "The 'Elder' in the Old and New Testaments," 84.

Similar expectations can be seen for New Testament elders in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Like Old Testament leadership, church elders were to be men of high character.

Teaching. One last similarity is the responsibility of teaching Scripture to the masses. Moses charged the elders of Israel with the distribution of the Law, perhaps also contributing to their authority and responsibility to hold the people accountable. New Testament elders were given the similar task of teaching God’s Word to the people. Though an individual elder may not teach regularly, every one of them should be able to do so if called on and be constantly overseeing the teaching happening in the church.

Whether in the Old Testament or New, elders were a group of upright and righteous men with God-given and publicly earned authority who looked after the welfare of the people by communicating and enforcing the Scriptures. The early Christian church appears to have been built on the same principles of leadership in which Israel was founded, including plurality, responsibility for the people, authority within the community, strong character, and a charge to communicate Scripture.⁴¹

Elders in Church History

The office of elder exists in similar form into the second century as the teaching of the Apostles in the *Didache*. Polycarp’s writings and other post-apostolic literature include only elders and deacons as local church offices and give instruction to appoint multiple elders.⁴² The *Didache* gives instruction to “appoint for yourselves bishops and deacons worthy of the Lord.”⁴³ It has even been shown that, as a whole, the

⁴¹ Roy B. Zuck, *Vital Church Issues: Examining Principles and Practices in Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 75-81.

⁴² Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 931-35.

⁴³ *Didache*, “The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles” XV 1, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts et al. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 7:381.

corpus of apostolic fathers contains evidence of a type of communal leadership, both over the local congregation and the entire church.⁴⁴ It is not until the late second century that a single elder, commonly called the bishop, is seen to be elevated above the congregation.⁴⁵ Mostly in response to heresy, elders and bishops started to be seen as distinct from one another and began to form a three-tiered leadership system—bishop, elder, deacon—in which the bishop of the city (or other large area) oversaw the elders of local congregations who in turn led the deacons.⁴⁶ Ignatius was the first to implement this three-tiered model.⁴⁷ He advocates a structure in which bishops and elders exercised authority over the church, but the bishop was elevated above the elders.⁴⁸ Every other church father at the time contradicted Ignatius by stating that the churches were led by a plurality of elders.⁴⁹ However, by the third and fourth century, the three-tiered structure

⁴⁴ Zachariah Lee Vester, “Patterns of Shared Leadership in the Apostolic Fathers” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014). 245. Vester used content analysis to discover patterns of shared leadership within the writings of the apostolic fathers. While this does not prove that they all advocated a system of plurality of elders, it does demonstrate that communal leadership, as opposed to hierarchical, was the norm at this time of the church’s history.

⁴⁵ Philip Schaff, *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1885), 66.

⁴⁶ Gregg Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 590-91.

⁴⁷ Ignatius separated a singular bishop from the plurality of elders and deacons. He wrote, “As there is one bishop, along with the presbytery and deacons.” Ignatius, *Epistle of Ignatius to the Philadelphians*, IV, in Roberts et al., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 1:81.

⁴⁸ Not only did Ignatius separate the offices, he clearly elevated the bishop above the elders. He wrote, “Your bishop presides in the place of God, and your presbyters in the place of the assembly of the apostles, along with your deacons.” Ignatius, *Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians*, VI, in Roberts et al., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 7:61. Elliott defends Ignatius to a certain degree and reminds the reader that this was a historical process that took time and thought to develop. Elliott, “Elders as Leaders,” 692. This change to elevate a bishop over the elders was not necessarily made in order to create a monarchical episcopate; it was done out of the necessity to protect a rapidly growing church. Modern churches should weigh these thoughts when discerning the proper church polity.

⁴⁹ Waldron, “Plural Elder Congregationalism,” 195.

was standard.⁵⁰ Over time, certain bishops were elevated above others and the Papacy formed throughout the Middle Ages.⁵¹

The Reformation's main change in ecclesiology was to untangle the ministry from civil government, but it also regained some biblical roots of church structure.⁵² Luther saw bishops/pastors leading the church (chosen by the church) whose responsibilities included preaching, administration of baptism and Lord's supper, and the exercise of church discipline.⁵³ Though the subsequent Lutheran church did not embrace congregationalism, Luther's doctrine on the priesthood of every Christian laid its foundation.⁵⁴ Calvin rejected the three level leadership of the bishop and instead had the local elders rule and thereby set the foundation for Presbyterian government. In total, he included four officers in each local church—teachers (doctors), pastors, ruling elders, and deacons.⁵⁵ The Westminster confession formalized the Presbyterian form of government with the inclusion of a local presbytery, a regional classis, and a national synod.⁵⁶

⁵⁰ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 592.

⁵¹ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 595-96.

⁵² Allison, *Historical Theology*, 602.

⁵³ Martin Luther, "On the Councils and the Church," in *Luther's Works*, ed. Eric W. Gritsch and Helmut T. Lehman (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 41:154.

⁵⁴ James Leo Garrett, Jr., "The Congregation-Led Church," in Brand and Norman, *Perspectives on Church Government*, 174. Luther advocated for the priesthood of the believer and believed that a congregation should choose its own leaders. Martin Luther, "That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge All Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers, Established and Proven by Scripture," in Gritsch and Lehman, *Luther's Works*, 39:305-14.

⁵⁵ The teachers, or doctors, were responsible for sound doctrine while the pastors preached the word and performed the sacraments. Allison, *Historical Theology*, 603. The governors, or ruling elders, led the church and were responsible for church discipline when necessary. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 1060.

⁵⁶ While a Presbyterian government would be centered on a plurality of local elders leading the church, there is still a call for government outside of the local body. George S. Hendry, *The Westminster Confession for Today* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1960), 239-42.

Separatists in England in the sixteenth century began calling for independence from hierarchy. Some give Robert Browne credit for starting the Congregationalist movement in earnest in 1582.⁵⁷ He affirmed the principle of the gathered church independent of any magistrates or bishops. The Pilgrim Fathers sailed to the new world in 1620, and established congregationalism in America.⁵⁸ Followers of Browne developed a fully democratic congregationalism whereas Puritan Congregationalists and Particular Baptists both advocated plural elders.⁵⁹

Baptists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries affirmed two offices in the local church: elders and deacons. They also espoused congregationalism in which these church officers were elected rather than appointed.⁶⁰ For some, such as churches in the influential Philadelphia Baptist Association, this elder-plurality took the form of ruling, or lay, elders which resembled a Presbyterian government yet without a hierarchy that extended beyond the local congregation.⁶¹ These congregational ruling elders were seen as a help to the pastor, but seemed to create a third office in the church separate from the pastor.⁶² By the nineteenth century, this practice of ruling elders had started to fade.⁶³ Many churches eliminated the office of ruling, or lay, elders, but began to believe that the

⁵⁷ L. L. Morris, "Church Government," in Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 258.

⁵⁸ Morris, "Church Government," 258.

⁵⁹ Waldron, "Plural Elder Congregationalism," 200.

⁶⁰ Waldron, "Plural Elder Congregationalism," 201.

⁶¹ Mark E. Dever, *By Whose Authority? Elders in Baptist Life* (Washington DC: 9Marks, 2006), 19.

⁶² See Benjamin Griffith, "A Short Treatise Concerning a True and Orderly Gospel Church," in *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life*, ed. Mark E. Dever (Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 98. Benjamin Griffith was pastor of Montgomery Baptist Church in Bucks County, PA, in the mid-eighteenth century.

⁶³ See Samuel Jones, "A Treatise of church discipline, and a Directory," in Dever, *Polity*, 145.

pastor together with the deacons formed the eldership.⁶⁴ By the mid-1800s, some Baptist churches in America had plural elders, equal in office, but different in function while other churches had a single elder.⁶⁵ Early Southern Baptist leaders, such as like W. B. Johnson, were in favor of a plurality of elders in each church.⁶⁶ Many Baptist churches by the turn of the century, however, had strayed completely from elder plurality, possibly due to life in rapidly expanding churches on the frontier.⁶⁷

The “1925 Baptist Faith and Message” builds on “1833 New Hampshire Confession” and supports two church offices—elders/bishops and deacons—so long as the form of church government is congregational.⁶⁸ The “1963 Baptist Faith and Message” expanded, adding, “This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. In such a congregation, members are equally responsible.”⁶⁹ It also changed “elders or bishops” to “pastors.” The change in terminology from elders or bishops to pastors was probably a reflection of the usage of

⁶⁴ Greg Wills, “The Church: Baptists and Their Churches in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” in Dever, *Polity*, 34.

⁶⁵ Akin, “The Single Elder-Led Church,” 57.

⁶⁶ W. B. Johnson, *The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ* (Richmond, VA: H. K. Ellyson, 1846), 77-87.

⁶⁷ Mark E. Dever, *A Display of God’s Glory: Basics of Church Structure* (Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 20.

⁶⁸ Akin, “The Single Elder-Led Church,” 58. The 1925 Baptist Faith and Message was the first of its kind for Southern Baptists. While associations at the time had various statements of faith, the convention, beginning in 1920, sparked by international travel allowed by the ending of the war and societal pressures such as the teaching of evolution, expressed a desire for a unified statement of faith. The New Hampshire confession served as the basis for the new document. William Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Chicago: Judson Press, 1959), 390-91. The 1833 New Hampshire Confession article regarding church government reads that “its only scriptural officers are Bishops or Pastors, and Deacons.” Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 365. The 1925 Baptist Faith and Message reads, “Its scriptural officers are bishops or elders and deacons.” Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 395. The committee for the 1925 Baptist Faith and Message, while keeping the verbiage virtually identical to 1833 New Hampshire confession, chose to use the term “elder” instead of the term “pastor.”

⁶⁹ Southern Baptist Convention, “Comparison of 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message,” accessed July 6, 2019, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfmcomparison.asp>.

the time. Bishop almost certainly carried a Roman Catholic connotation, but the dropping of the term *elder* is unclear.⁷⁰ The “1988 SBC Resolution on the Priesthood of the Believer” reaffirmed both congregationalism and the authority of the pastor and sought a balance between the priesthood of the believer and the leadership of the clergy.⁷¹ The “2000 Baptist Faith and Message” changed some wording and limited the pastoral office to men.⁷²

An overview of church history reveals that plural local eldership faded as the monarchical episcopacy was created to help combat heresy. The reformation rediscovered congregational independence and a plurality of elders. Some denominations, such as Presbyterianism maintained a loose hierarchy but replaced a singular bishop with groups of elders. Others espoused full democracy within a congregation independent from any outside party. Still others combined these rediscoveries and advocated plural elder congregationalism. Though not uniform, one of these groups was Baptists. In summary, John Piper writes,

⁷⁰ Akin, “The Single Elder-Led Church,” 60. Almer Smith’s book based on his dissertation on this 1963 Baptist Faith and Message makes no mention of a reasoning for the change other than to note that Dale Moody was against it and would have preferred to keep “elder,” which appeared in the previous Baptist confession. Almer Jesse Smith, *The Making of the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 129. Neither does Hershel Hobbs’ (chairman of the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message committee) commentary on the document mention any reasoning for the change to “pastors” other than to generally site “certain needs of our generation,” which may support Akin’s suspicion. Hershel H. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1971), 3.

⁷¹ Akin, “The Single Elder-Led Church,” 60. See resolution at Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution on the Priesthood of the Believer,” San Antonio, TX, 1988, accessed May 5, 2016, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/872>.

⁷² Regarding the local church, this most current version of the Baptist Faith and Message, shown on the SBC website, Article VI, reads,

A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture. (the SBC website. Article VI, reads, (Southern Baptist Convention, “Comparison of 1925, 1963 and 2000 Baptist Faith and Message”)

The least we can say from this historical survey of Baptist Confessions is that *it is false to say that the eldership is unbaptistic*. On the contrary, the eldership is more baptistic than its absence, and its disappearance is a modern phenomenon that parallels other developments in doctrine that make its disappearance questionable at best.⁷³

In the present, some Southern Baptist churches are making changes from a single elder to a form of plural elder congregationalism. Dever, whose church was one of them, lists five possible reasons: (1) influence of advocates outside of the SBC, (2) a frustration with current structures, (3) cultural trend to be less attached to a denomination, (4) a rediscovery of elders in our Baptist past, and (5) renewed emphasis on the inerrancy of the Bible.⁷⁴ It remains to be seen how widespread this phenomenon currently is.

Contemporary Models of Church Polity

Most scholars have agreed that while church government is not the most important issue with which a body of believers may struggle, it is worthy of study and consideration.⁷⁵ Some point out the fact that there are no prescriptive commands regarding church polity and that the New Testament is inconclusive on the matter.⁷⁶ Others believe the New Testament demonstrates a definite pattern that should be followed whenever possible because it is an important issue that dictates who can be the leader,

⁷³ Piper lists a number of various Baptist confessions and arrives at this conclusion. See John Piper, "Biblical Eldership," accessed January 7, 2018, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/biblical-eldership-part-1a#HistoricConfessions>.

⁷⁴ Dever, *By Whose Authority?*, 22-27.

⁷⁵ In his introduction, Stephen Cowan writes, "The issue of church government may not be a doctrine crucial to the being of the church, but it is a doctrine crucial to the well-being of the church." Cowan, *Who Runs the Church?*, 11. Similarly, Grudem admits that the form of church government is not a major doctrine and one which believers should be able to amicably disagree, but yet a matter that is important to the purity of the church. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 904-5. In the introduction to *Perspectives on Church Government*, Stan Norman notes that none of his theology students ever list church government as dogma essential to the Christian faith, but they do debate on whether the topic should be considered doctrine or opinion. Brand and Norman, *Perspectives on Church Government*, 2.

⁷⁶ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1094. Robert Wring, "An Examination of the Practice of Elder Rule in Selected Southern Baptist Churches in the Light of New Testament Teaching" (PhD diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2002), 210.

what a leader does, and to whom the leader is accountable.⁷⁷ The historical survey and modern thought leave the contemporary church with four basic kinds of government, all laying some claim to be the most biblical, historical, or effective, and all are seen actively in churches today. There are other forms of church leadership besides these four, but most of them amount to a non-government and therefore will not be considered here.⁷⁸ The four seen in contemporary churches are Episcopal, Presbyterian, and Congregational—both single elder and plural elder varieties.⁷⁹

These four types of government can be differentiated through a grid of two variables: (1) autonomy versus hierarchy and (2) individual versus plural leadership. Autonomy is the ability for the local church to govern itself.⁸⁰ Each congregation calls its own pastor, determines its budget, and purchases and owns its own property.⁸¹ In contradiction to autonomy, a hierarchy is established within a denomination and ultimate control for the local church rests outside of that congregation. Such a hierarchy can run as high as the national or worldwide level depending on the denomination. Governments also differ based on the number of people in a level of leadership. A church could either be led by an individual or by a small group of people. As seen in figure 1, each of these four contemporary forms of polity occupy one quadrant of this grid. This figure ignores overlaps for the sake of clarity and so that the primary differences can be seen. A church with an individual hierarchy that extends beyond the local congregation is considered an

⁷⁷ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 21; Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1995), 10.

⁷⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 935.

⁷⁹ Cowan, *Who Runs the Church?*, is a survey of these four types of church government. Meanwhile, Brand and Norman's *Perspectives on Church Government* distinguishes congregationalism from single elder-led and plural elder-led churches for a total of five types of government, but neither elder-led government is presented outside the definition of congregationalism.

⁸⁰ Erikson, *Christian Theology*, 1089.

⁸¹ Edward T. Hiscox, *The New Directory for Baptist Churches* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1894), 153-54.

Episcopal government. A similar hierarchy, except with a group of people, is considered a Presbyterian government. Churches with no hierarchy extending beyond the local congregation are considered autonomous, or congregational in nature. Congregational governments can be led by an individual leader or plural leaders, but ultimate authority rests in the congregation.

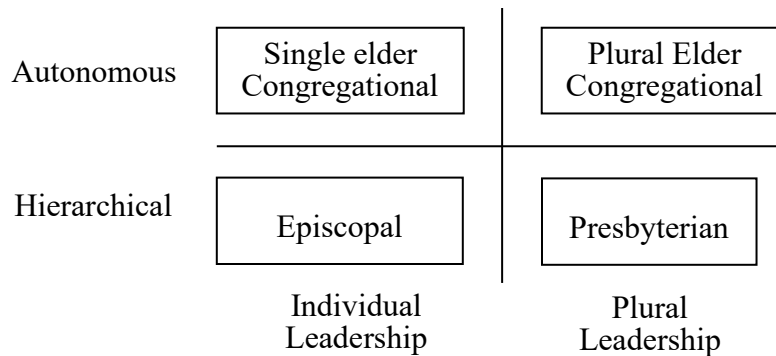


Figure 1. Contemporary church governments

The roots of Episcopal governments are easy to trace. As described in the historical overview of polity, the second century saw an individual local elder elevated in authority above the other elders and given the title of bishop. The hierarchy continued upward as some bishops were elevated over others and so on until the papacy was born. This type of government dominated in churches throughout the middle ages and it continues today in several denominations, including Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, and Methodism. Advocates of Episcopal government place much weight on church history to demonstrate this as the proper polity.⁸² It continues to function based on the second century three-tiered system of bishops, elders, and deacons.⁸³ The criticism of this

⁸² Peter Toon, "Episcopalianism," in Cowan, *Who Runs the Church?*, 153.

⁸³ Morris, "Church Government," 258.

polity from Congregationalists is found in the lack of church autonomy. For plural elder advocates, there is the additional problem of individual leadership.

Presbyterianism began with the influence of John Calvin and emphasizes the importance of a plurality of leadership, thus the name that echoes the Greek root of “elder.”⁸⁴ Each church elects a group of ruling elders, called the presbytery, and the congregation along with the presbytery elects a teaching elder. The teaching elder and ruling elders have different functions. The congregation is subject to the decisions of the ruling elders and sits under the preaching of the teaching elder.⁸⁵ Though the authority is much weaker than in Episcopal governments, there is still a loose hierarchy beyond the local congregation. Each church sends some of their elders to be a part of a local synod which has some authority over the local congregations. Single elder and plural elder Congregationalists critique the lack of full autonomy and the distinction between teaching and ruling elders.⁸⁶

Congregationalism began with the separatists in England that then blossomed in America. The principal tenet of Congregationalism is the priesthood of the believer. It is believed that no hierarchy should exist outside of the local church and therefore each member of a church should have a say in its affairs. The church gathered is responsible for decisions on membership, leadership, doctrine, worship, conduct, missions, finances, property, association, etc.⁸⁷ In a democratic church, each member is not free to vote as

⁸⁴ Reymond, “The Presbytery-led Church,” 118. Reymond acknowledges that Calvin did not have the full blown Presbyterian government seen today, but later Presbyterians followed his lead on the sufficiency of Scripture. See n93 for further explanation of Calvin’s system of government.

⁸⁵ Elsie Anne McKee, *Elders and the Plural Ministry: The Role of Exegetical History in Illuminating John Calvin’s Theology* (Genève: Libr. Droz, 1988).

⁸⁶ Paige Patterson, “Single-Elder Congregationalism,” in Cowan, *Who Runs the Church?*, 107-8; Waldron, “Plural Elder Congregationalism,” 115-17.

⁸⁷ Garrett, “The Congregation-Led Church,” 157.

they desire but is instructed to vote as they feel Christ is leading.⁸⁸ While many congregational churches do form associations, church autonomy is always quite clear. What is not as clear is the level of democracy in each church. Congregational churches range from fully democratic to representative leadership to even some autocratic forms of local leadership. It is at this point where single elder and plural elder Congregationalists disagree.

Single Elder versus Plural Elder Congregational

Congregationalism can be expressed in a multitude of ways, but the most common, in Baptist churches at least, is single elder congregationalism.⁸⁹ In this model, the congregation still holds ultimate authority through their voting rights, but a pastor is given a certain degree of authority and responsibility to oversee the church. His leadership is found in setting the vision and doing most of the preaching and teaching.⁹⁰ This single elder may or may not have a pastoral staff and is often assisted by deacons.⁹¹ However, some single elder churches are recognizing the need to move to a plural elder model. These congregations do not believe that one person should be singled out as *the* pastor.⁹² They replace this single elder with a small group of elders that share the authority and responsibility of leading the church. This plural elder model can take different forms, including possibly removing some decisions that previously would have been subject to a church vote. It is a matter of debate whether congregational polity must be purely democratic or if plural elders that function as representative leadership could also be

⁸⁸ Patterson, "Single-Elder Congregationalism," 238.

⁸⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 938.

⁹⁰ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 28.

⁹¹ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 28.

⁹² Merkle, *40 Questions*, 28.

considered congregational.⁹³ Many scholars believe that both models can be called congregational so long as the local congregation retains the ultimate authority.⁹⁴ The different forms of plural elder congregationalism will be explained later. This section examines the support and criticism for each model of congregationalism.

Support for a Single Elder Congregational Model

Proponents of single elder congregationalism are numerous. One of the earliest, often cited champions of this model is Southern Baptist theologian A. H. Strong. Primarily using passages regarding unity and harmony, Strong makes a case for congregationalism as a whole.⁹⁵ He asserts that Christ is King and head of the church, but that interpretation and execution of Christ's will must occur in an absolute democracy.⁹⁶ More recently, Paige Patterson has made the case for single elder congregationalism. He argues that in each local church of the New Testament, one elder would have remained the clear leader.⁹⁷ He, along with others, uses biblical leaders such as Moses, the judges, Peter among the apostles, and James in the Jerusalem council to demonstrate that God has typically called individuals to lead, not groups.⁹⁸ Proponents of a single elder government

⁹³ Chad Brand, introduction to Brand and Norman *Perspectives on Church Government*, 21.

⁹⁴ Akin writes, "Both a single elder and a plurality of elders within a Congregational structure fit the pattern of church government and polity that emerges from a study of the New Testament." Akin, "The Single Elder-Led Church," 26. Hammet writes, "Elder leadership can coexist with congregational government." John S. Hammet, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 154. Newton writes, "Plural eldership should not eliminate congregationalism." Phil Newton, *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 77.

⁹⁵ Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 33rd ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1977), 504.

⁹⁶ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 504.

⁹⁷ Patterson, "Single-Elder Congregationalism," 134.

⁹⁸ Patterson, "Single-Elder Congregationalism," 151.

also cite the seven church letters of Revelation that were addressed to “the angel” of each church, since they were addressed to individuals and not a group.⁹⁹ Also, proponents of single elder congregationalism would argue that in the pastoral epistles (namely 1 Tim 3) Paul discusses a singular bishop while mentioning plural deacons.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, even though the title of “senior pastor” is not found in the New Testament, a case could be made for Ephesians 4:11 referring to the primary preacher-teacher of a local congregation.¹⁰¹

Beyond the biblical text, arguments for a single elder also come from practicality. Church growth leader Peter Wagner compares the church to the army and as such has argued that in order for a church to grow rapidly, it must have a single leader giving the orders, passed along from the “Commander-in-Chief,” Jesus Christ.¹⁰² Similarly, Patterson argues that the psychology of leadership is evidence for the strength of a single elder model.¹⁰³ The single elder model of congregationalism has been effective in many churches and does have many strengths, but it also has its weaknesses.

Criticisms of Single Elder Congregationalism

The arguments against a church being led by a single elder are both biblical and practical. Grudem explains that, biblically speaking, “no passage suggests that any

⁹⁹ Waldron, “Plural Elder Congregationalism,” 213. The Greek for *angel* simply means messenger and some therefore believe that this reference is to a single elder leading the particular church.

¹⁰⁰ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 607. In 1 Tim 3, Paul describes the qualifications for an overseer using the singular in vv. 1-2, and then describes the qualifications for the deacons using the plural in v. 8. Proponents of a single elder would say this demonstrates one elder with many multiple deacons.

¹⁰¹ Akin writes, “It is extremely likely that the pastor-teacher is an elder, but the unique designation (pastor-teacher occurs only here) and context strongly suggests that this office is also distinctive (within the category of elder).” Akin, “The Single Elder-Led Church,” 65.

¹⁰² Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1976), 65.

¹⁰³ Patterson, “Single-Elder Congregationalism,” 151.

church, no matter how small, had only one elder.”¹⁰⁴ In regard to church leadership, the Bible offers little data to support the fact that an individual must serve as a primary leader.¹⁰⁵ In critiquing typical Baptist polity (single elder congregationalism), Charles Reagan came to the conclusion that despite a high view of Scripture, Baptist churches do not function with a government that is found in the New Testament.¹⁰⁶ In defending this model, Danny Akin admits that a single elder is not as biblically supported as is commonly believed in Southern Baptist life.¹⁰⁷ Many scholars, even those in favor of a single elder model, agree that it does not have a lot of biblical support.¹⁰⁸

The critique is also theological in nature. Many opponents of a single elder system believe that the Bible does not portray this model of leadership in the church because Christ was always meant to be the sole Head of His church and therefore elevating one person to an individual position of power is unscriptural.¹⁰⁹ In this case, much of the argument against single elder congregationalism is against the single elder, not necessarily the congregational authority. Too often that single elder is given too much authority by the congregation and unintentionally takes the place reserved for Christ. Many Baptist churches consequently claim congregationalism, but actually practice

¹⁰⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 913.

¹⁰⁵ Gene A. Getz, *Elders and Leaders: God's Plan for Leading the Church: A Biblical, Historical, and Cultural Perspective* (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 217.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Reagan, “Applying Biblical Principles to Baptist Polity” (PhD thesis, California Graduate School of Theology, 1982), 187.

¹⁰⁷ Akin, “The Single Elder-Led Church,” 64.

¹⁰⁸ With this admission of the clarity of the text, one can wonder why the push against plural elders. Much of this debate over single elder versus plural seems to come down to a type of regulative versus normative argument. A regulative view of Scripture would say that a church may only do what the Bible demonstrates while a normative view would allow anything Scripture does not forbid. Many single elder advocates, including the ones mentioned here, ultimately arrive at the conclusion that Scripture does not establish a standard type of church government and the local church is therefore free to do what works best, which they believe is single elder congregationalism.

¹⁰⁹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1995), 115.

monarchical episcopacy, where one individual rules over the church.¹¹⁰ D. A. Carson notes, “Ironically, some forms of congregationalism elevate the pastor, once he has been voted in, to near papal authority, in practice if not in theory.”¹¹¹ This elevation of the pastor is certainly not the design of single elder congregationalism, as Akin states, “there is no biblical defense for a dictatorial, autocratic, CEO model for ministry leadership.”¹¹² Yet, in a single elder system, the pastor is often elevated to a dangerous place of unchecked authority.

Though it is certainly not a given, this power can enable the pastor to take advantage of his position in the church. However, in this model, this elevated position can also create an incredible burden. A single elder can have too much authority or too much responsibility, or both, which can lead to the elder abusing the church or the church abusing the elder.¹¹³ As a result of being the primary individual with authority and responsibility, many pastors must resemble corporate CEOs rather than humble shepherds, which requires them to have incredible leadership skills to succeed.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, caring for the church is often too much for one man to handle and attempting to do so can lead to frustration and burnout.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 59.

¹¹¹ D. A. Carson, “Church, Authority in the,” in Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 250.

¹¹² Akin, “The Single Elder-Led Church,” 69. Presently, a well-known advocate of the CEO model is pastor Andy Stanley. In a 2006 interview Stanley stated his strong support for such a model. Marshall Shelley and Eric Reed, “State of the Art: Andy Stanley on God’s Ways, Cultural Assumptions, and Leading,” *Leadership Journal* 27 (Spring 2006): 26-32.

¹¹³ Waldron, “Plural Elder Congregationalism,” 247.

¹¹⁴ Reagan, “Applying Biblical Principles to Baptist Polity,” 4.

¹¹⁵ Benjamin L. Merkle, *Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009), 52.

Critics of a single elder model believe that these abuses also reveal the inherent lack of accountability for an individual leader. Grudem writes,

A common practical problem with a ‘single elder’ system is either an excessive concentration of power in one person or excessive demands laid upon him. In either case, the temptations to sin are very great, and a lessened degree of accountability makes yielding to temptation more likely.

This lack of accountability is one of the most dangerous aspects of single elder congregationalism. Accountability is a must for every leader.¹¹⁶ Many single elder congregations have created systems of accountability for their leader, but it is not naturally built into the model since the pastor primarily functions alone.

Also inherent in the single elder model is the perceived reduction for the need of other gifts in the church, which stifles the growth of other potential leaders.¹¹⁷

Alexander Strauch is quite direct in his critique of this aspect of single elder congregationalism:

There is a dark side to the super-pastor concept that is seldom talked about: many churches are lead by highly independent, domineering, egotistical men who desperately need accountability and balance. The superstar approach is the wrong model for a body that preaches and practices humble servanthood and close interdependence on one another’s gifts and services.¹¹⁸

An individual “super-pastor” can feel compelled to do most everything himself. Therefore, single elder congregationalism may not afford the necessary opportunities for other men in the congregation to fully develop a leadership gift, thereby stunting the spiritual growth of that local church and the kingdom. Some single elder congregations have overcome this weakness through emphasizing the equipping role of the pastor or hiring large staffs to assist the pastor in ministry. However, the primary responsibility to equip remains on one man. As long as one elder has more authority than another and has been set aside as

¹¹⁶ Akin, “The Single Elder-Led Church,” 71.

¹¹⁷ Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, 2nd ed. (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1988), 22.

¹¹⁸ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, 22.

the pastor, the government is operating as a single elder polity and authority rests on an individual.¹¹⁹

Churches can overcome some of the weaknesses of a single elder government that were just discussed by moving toward a much fuller democracy. However, that type of system has its criticisms as well. While congregationalism as a whole is quite biblically defensible, the process of voting for all church decisions is not. Voting is not infallible.¹²⁰ Full democratic congregationalism is unscriptural for it cannot be assumed that all members have the spiritual maturity to seek God's desires.¹²¹ Radically democratic churches are an invention of experience rather than the example of Scripture.¹²² Scripture focuses on unity and harmony not unanimity or even majority.¹²³ Due to fear that church leadership may extend their authority too far, men have created governments that extend the congregation's authority too far.¹²⁴ Patterson admits that the church can be filled with immature and even unregenerate members, but he believes this is made up for in the multitude of the counsel in the congregational system.¹²⁵ Many Baptists have taken solace in a system that allows uninformed, sometimes immature members to help make decisions for the direction of the church. While congregation involvement is seen in the New Testament churches, the concept of allowing everyone an equal say in matters is not.

¹¹⁹ Cowan, *Who Runs the Church?*, 14.

¹²⁰ Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 58.

¹²¹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1988), 118.

¹²² Waldron, "Plural Elder Congregationalism," 218.

¹²³ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1988), 120.

¹²⁴ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1988), 119.

¹²⁵ Patterson, "Single-Elder Congregationalism," 141.

Furthermore, a full democratic model can grow quite cumbersome and inefficient. Abuses can lead to long, divisive business meetings.¹²⁶ Decisions become more and more difficult as the church grows.¹²⁷ In a large church, full congregational democracy may be impractical and even proponents of full congregationalism, like Millard Erikson, admit that a more representative approach would work so long as those elected officials continued to serve the congregation's wishes.¹²⁸ Both biblically and practically, congregationalism is better practiced in the form of a representative model.¹²⁹

Support for a Plural Elder Congregational Model

The alternative to a single elder congregational model that is being studied in this dissertation replaces the single elder with a group of elders that share both authority and responsibility for the church. Much of the argument for a plural elder congregational model centers on *sola scriptura* and a desire to be as biblical as possible in church polity.¹³⁰ As has already been shown, the argument for some type of plural elders in the local church is rooted in what appears to be a clearly biblical model. Even advocates for a single elder model admit that the argument for a plurality of elders is easier to make biblically.¹³¹ The New Testament churches present a unified and consistent pattern of plural elders.¹³² No New Testament church definitively had a single elder, yet multiple

¹²⁶ Patterson, "Single-Elder Congregationalism," 142.

¹²⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 935.

¹²⁸ Erikson, *Christian Theology*, 1097.

¹²⁹ Akin, "The Single Elder-Led Church," 70.

¹³⁰ White, "The Plural Elder-Led Church," 255.

¹³¹ Akin, "The Single Elder-Led Church," 64.

¹³² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 912-13.

churches provide examples of plural elders.¹³³ W. B. Johnson, the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, believed that, in reviewing Scripture, it was clear that a plurality of elders was ordained over each church of Christ in the apostolic age with ministerial and executive authority, but not legislative authority.¹³⁴ He taught a type of plural elder congregationalism in which the authority and responsibility were shared equally among the elders, but uniquely.¹³⁵ His opinion was based almost solely on his review of Scripture.

Not every advocate for this model believes that a lack of plural elders is necessarily sinful, but it is scripturally abnormal.¹³⁶ Johnson explains, “You do not need a plurality of elders to be a functioning church, but apparently Paul regarded a church without such a plurality to be ‘lacking.’”¹³⁷ The biblical evidence seems to point so clearly to a plurality of elders that a single elder model should only be a temporary state born out of necessity.¹³⁸

Advocates believe there are two primary reasons the Bible models plural elder oversight: Jesus is already the Pastor and there is no practical way one man can properly

¹³³ Waldron, “Plural Elder Congregationalism,” 212.

¹³⁴ Johnson, *The Gospel Developed*, 77. The congregation alone retained the right to shape the bylaws and overall direction of the church while the elders could feel freedom with their executive authority to minister within that framework.

¹³⁵ W. B. Johnson advocated different department heads that remained equally in authority. Similar to some church staffs today, these department heads shared the work of the ministry. However, unlike today, there was a perfect equality of rank among them. If it occurred that only one man was qualified for eldership, that should be considered a temporary situation until another could be named as soon as possible. See Johnson, *The Gospel Developed*, 80ff.

¹³⁶ Waldron, “Plural Elder Congregationalism,” 213.

¹³⁷ Jon Zens, “The Major Concepts of Eldership in the New Testament,” *Baptist Reformation Review* 7 (Summer 1978): 29.

¹³⁸ Johnson, *The Gospel Developed*, 87

and adequately shepherd a good sized flock.¹³⁹ Theologically speaking, a plural elder system better illustrates that Christ is the Head of the church.¹⁴⁰ Shared leadership also better matches the principles of community taught by Christ.¹⁴¹ It provides a better picture of the body of Christ with Him as the only Head.¹⁴² It has been observed that some pastors pursue a plurality of elders not because they want more power, but because they feel they have too much power.¹⁴³

Practically speaking, there are a multitude of benefits listed by the proponents of a plurality of elders. There are benefits to the pastor(s) and to the church as a whole. Many of these strengths correspond to weaknesses of a single elder polity. Multiple functioning elders can provide each other with accountability and protection from sin.¹⁴⁴ The shared leadership can minimize blind spots and idiosyncrasies through a balanced team approach.¹⁴⁵ The group effort can allow several men to share the load of leading and shepherding a church.¹⁴⁶ Plurality provides better perspective and wisdom.¹⁴⁷ All of these benefits should result in more sound decisions by the leadership and decreased burnout among pastors.

¹³⁹ Zens, "The Major Concepts of Eldership," 28

¹⁴⁰ Waldron, "Plural Elder Congregationalism," 176.

¹⁴¹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1995), 32.

¹⁴² Merkle, *40 Questions*, 183

¹⁴³ Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 116.

¹⁴⁴ Waldron, "Plural Elder Congregationalism," 176.

¹⁴⁵ Waldron, "Plural Elder Congregationalism," 176.

¹⁴⁶ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 183

¹⁴⁷ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1988), 20.

The church is also blessed with a diversity of gifts, ages, and personalities among their leadership,¹⁴⁸ which affords a congregation the opportunity to learn from, minister with, and be shepherded by more than one type of person. It has commonly been said that a church takes on the personality of its pastor, but the hope in a plurality of pastors is that the church takes on the personality of Christ. A plurality of elders also provides more leadership opportunities within the church. A plural eldership multiplies the number of equipped leaders serving the church because there are more people equipping. Additionally, men that feel called to pursue eldership but have difficulty as a sole leader tend to excel on a leadership team, thereby providing leadership opportunities that were not there previously.¹⁴⁹ Plural-elder leadership more closely fits the biblical examples, paints a better picture of Christ as the Head, and has many practical benefits to the leadership and church.

Criticisms of Plural Elder Congregationalism

If these arguments for a plurality of elders are indeed true, why do the vast majority of Southern Baptist churches remain in a single elder congregational model? The plural elder model has just as many detractors as it does supporters. While critics of this model do acknowledge the biblical example of plurality of elders, they argue that, since it is not mandated, churches are free to structure how they wish.¹⁵⁰ Strong taught that the plurality of elders seen in the New Testament could have been due to the size of the churches and that the plurality was not uniform and certainly not required.¹⁵¹ Carson,

¹⁴⁸ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1988), 20.

¹⁴⁹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1988), 20.

¹⁵⁰ Again, since the biblical picture of plural elders is relatively clear, the debate then centers on whether or not this consistent example is prescriptive or descriptive.

¹⁵¹ Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 510.

though in favor of plural elders in general, points out that the biblical pattern seen could be citywide churches in which a single elder presided over an individual house church.¹⁵² The majority of criticisms, however, are not of the biblical variety.

The primary argument against a plural elder polity seems to be pragmatic. It is a difficult system to employ. It is hard to share leadership. Church strategist Aubrey Malphurs argues against lay elders by pointing out the workload discrepancy between full-time ministers and part-time elders.¹⁵³ He does not believe that co-leadership can work practically and therefore sides with Peter Wagner in teaching that churches that want to grow should be led by an individual leader.¹⁵⁴ Patterson points to a similar reason to be against plural leadership: “Sociologically, to have clear leaders is the normal state of affairs. Democracies with elected leaders and monarchies prove workable while oligarchy is always condemned to struggle.”¹⁵⁵ Many proponents of shared leadership would agree that a plurality of elders is more difficult. It is a logistical challenge because humanity is fallen and sinful. Shared leadership reveals impatience, pride, and immaturity.¹⁵⁶ Newton explains, “At the root of much opposition to plural eldership are

¹⁵² Carson, “Church, Authority in the,” 250. Those against a plurality of elders would build on the argument that due to both persecution and size, the early church had to meet in homes. At each of these house churches, there could have been a single elder presiding over that portion of the congregation, while the city-wide church still had a plurality of elders. That situation could be reflected in today’s single pastor leading a local congregation while associating with other like churches. Proponents of plural elders concede that this may be a possibility but do not believe it to erase the need for plurality in the local congregation today. Reynolds writes, “Even if it be conceded, therefore, that the number of elders, found in the primitive Churches, was rendered necessary by their habit of assembling in different places of worship, this does not affect the congregational character of these Churches; since each body of elders was addressed as the officers of ‘the Church.’” J. L. Reynolds, “Church Polity or the Kingdom of Christi, in Its Internal and External Development,” in Dever, *Polity*, 322

¹⁵³ Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century: A Comprehensive Guide for New Churches and Those Desiring Renewal*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 101.

¹⁵⁴ Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches*, 112.

¹⁵⁵ Patterson, “Single-Elder Congregationalism,” 240.

¹⁵⁶ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1995), 114.

pastors who fear the loss of their authority in the church.”¹⁵⁷ There is little dispute that a plural elder model of congregationalism is much more challenging than a single elder model.

Another prevalent criticism of plural elder polity seems to be somewhat unique to Southern Baptist circles. Many fear that plural elder leadership will slide toward something that is not honoring to Baptist tradition and therefore loses a denominational distinctive. Some believe that elder-led churches are too close to a Presbyterian-style government with some people even referring to them as “presbygational.”¹⁵⁸ The argument is primarily against ruling lay elders that seem to establish a third office in the church—“pastor and deacons” becomes “pastor, elders, and deacons.”¹⁵⁹ Some Southern Baptist leaders also see Calvinism and Reformed Theology as the primary influence on pastors moving to elder rule.¹⁶⁰ The tie to an already controversial doctrine causes some churches to steer clear. The chief concern seems to be whether plural elders can truly be combined with congregationalism.¹⁶¹ Though the elders should represent the congregation, there is a fear they will instead usurp that authority.¹⁶² Many feel that the doctrine of priesthood of the believer would be surrendered if elders were given the decision-making

¹⁵⁷ Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 59.

¹⁵⁸ Wring, “An Examination of the Practice of Elder Rule,” 143.

¹⁵⁹ Throughout his dissertation, Wring argues against plural elders because of the apparent addition of a third office. He does not address any other model. Wring, “An Examination of the Practice of Elder Rule.”

¹⁶⁰ Wring, “An Examination of the Practice of Elder Rule,” 135.

¹⁶¹ Alexander Carson has demonstrated the distinction between Presbyterian belief and Baptist belief when separating from his synod because of autonomy and believer’s baptism while maintaining a plurality of elders within the congregation. In his thorough examination of the scriptures, he became convinced of the Baptist foundations of congregationalism and believer’s baptism, but held firm to a plurality of elders. Alexander Carson, *The Ecclesiastical Polity of the New Testament* (Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006).

¹⁶² Erikson, *Christian Theology*, 1088-89.

authority.¹⁶³ So, on one end of the spectrum are critics who believe a plural elder structure would take too much authority away from the pastor, but on the other end are critics who believe too much authority will be taken from the congregation. Any church wishing to transition to a plurality of elders would need to consider each of these criticisms as they move forward.

Understanding Plural Elder Congregationalism

Several works of note over the past few decades have influenced congregational leaders toward a plurality of elders. Key early influencers include John MacArthur, John Piper, and Alexander Strauch.¹⁶⁴ More recent works from Mark Dever, Wayne Grudem, Benjamin Merkle, and Phil Newton have also promoted plural elder congregationalism possibilities to Southern Baptist churches.¹⁶⁵ This dissertation may discover other sources of influence.¹⁶⁶ This rediscovery of elder plurality is still relatively young and so many logistical and practical questions remain unanswered. As such, each local model of plural

¹⁶³ Robert Mathis writes of an occasion in 1988, at the Southern Baptist Convention just after a resolution on the Priesthood of the Believer took place when pamphlets were handed out discouraging the use of elders in Baptist churches. However, the argument is against a three-tiered Elder-rule in which a third office of ruling elders is added to pastor and deacon. Most current proponents of plural elders in Southern Baptist churches do not advocate ruling elders, but a type of first among equals (discussed later). Robert Mathis, “Elders in Baptist Churches,” *The Theological Educator* 42 (Fall 1990), 23-27.

¹⁶⁴ In 1984, John MacArthur released a booklet entitled “Answering the Key Questions about Elders”—accessed July 20, 2018, <https://www.gty.org/library/articles/451016/answering-key-questions-about-elders>. In 1987, John Piper presented a paper to his church entitled “Biblical Eldership” and it is available in the form of seminar notes—accessed July 20, 2018, <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/biblical-eldership-part-1a>. Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1985), was the first author to publish a full length work.

¹⁶⁵ In 1992, Wayne Grudem presented a paper at ETS, then advocated for plural elders in his *Systematic Theology* (1994). Mark Dever has now published several works on the issue. Two early works, *9 Marks of a Healthy Church* (2000) and *A Display of God’s Glory* (2001) both advocate plurality of elders. Following his 2000 SBTS dissertation on the topic, Benjamin Merkle wrote *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (2008) and *Why Elders? A Biblical and Practical Guide for Church Members* (2009). Phil Newton released *Elders in Congregational Life: Rediscovering the Biblical Model for Church Leadership* (2005) and now has an updated version with Matt Schmucker, entitled *Elders in the Life of the Church* (2014).

¹⁶⁶ The previous lists of authors are not meant to be exhaustive, but they are the presumed influencers of Southern Baptist churches that have attempted a transition.

elder congregationalism could look quite different. One of the by-products of this dissertation is to discover what plural elder congregationalism looks like in Southern Baptist life. What follows is an overview of structures and questions within this polity.

Basic Plural Elder Structure

Though variations abound, some basic attributes would be required for a church to operate in a plural elder congregational model. First, and most obvious, there must be more than one elder, pastor, or overseer. Whatever authority is possessed belongs to the group and should be shared equally as a group.¹⁶⁷ Although advocates of plural elders seem to agree on this point of equal authority, some churches may have elders with different levels of authority. A single elder may exert more influence, but if that single elder has more formal, documented authority then it is not technically a plurality of elders.¹⁶⁸ That is not to say that every elder must weigh in on every decision. Elders should share in responsibility and authority, yet possibly in varying degrees.¹⁶⁹ Most proponents of plural elder congregationalism support the possibility of a “first among equals” model.¹⁷⁰ A *primus inter pares* is observed biblically in the twelve disciples and the seven men chosen in Acts 6.¹⁷¹ Gene Getz is a pastor and writer who supports a plurality of elders, but heavily favors a primary leader.¹⁷² He writes, “When there is a plurality of leadership, someone needs to function as the primary leader of the team.”¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 933.

¹⁶⁸ Waldron, “Plural Elder Congregationalism,” 175.

¹⁶⁹ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 173.

¹⁷⁰ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 174.

¹⁷¹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1988), 249. Among the twelve disciples and seven chosen men, Peter and Stephen had prominent roles, though there is no indication that these were distinct functions.

¹⁷² Getz, *Elders and Leaders*, 253.

¹⁷³ Getz, *Elders and Leaders*, 181.

Therefore, the structure of plural eldership in local congregations will vary from church to church. In writing about this phenomenon in the SBC, Wring notes the different types of elder plurality that one interviewee listed in his state: informal eldership, formal advisory and accountability elected by church, elders with equal authority, and ruling elders that oversee the pastor.¹⁷⁴ Waldron notes that a continuum spans from equal elders with little to no distinction among responsibilities to a model where one elder is designated the pastor and is from outside the church, is the only one seminary trained, and is clearly distinct from the others while retaining the same authority.¹⁷⁵ Both extremes could be considered a plurality of elders. In the latter version however, these lay elders should still have some degree of authority and responsibility to carrying out ministry in the church. Some writers point out that plural eldership must be more than just an advisory board for the pastor.¹⁷⁶ Churches favoring a designated pastor on an elder board may also go so far as to make a distinction between a teaching elder and ruling elders. The argument for such a separation is typically based on 1 Timothy 5:17 where Paul states that those elders who rule well, especially teachers, are worthy of double honor. However, many current proponents of elder plurality agree that a teaching and ruling elder distinction is artificial.¹⁷⁷ There should be no distinction between ruling and teaching elders. Every

¹⁷⁴ Wring, “An Examination of the Practice of Elder Rule,” 150-51.

¹⁷⁵ Waldron, “Plural Elder Congregationalism,” 192.

¹⁷⁶ Waldron, “Plural Elder Congregationalism,” 177.

¹⁷⁷ Zens, “The Major Concepts of Eldership,” 30. Phil Newton and Matt Schmucker, *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 206; Merkle, *40 Questions*, 173. Wring opposes this model of teaching and ruling elders in his 2003 dissertation. While many advocates of a plurality of elders agree that there should be no distinction between teaching and ruling elders, the fact that some support one elder teaching more than others and a first among equals model leads Wring to critique plural eldership in general as creating a third office. He would argue that adding plural elders to an existing single elder congregational church would in turn elevate the pastor to the role of bishop or overseer and create a three-office system of teaching elder, ruling elders, and deacons. See Wring, “An Examination of the Practice of Elder Rule,” 152ff.

elder is required to be able to teach and to rule.¹⁷⁸ If in place, this distinction could be close to what Grudem describes as a “corporate board” in which the church elects a board of elders that then recommend and oversee a pastor.¹⁷⁹ Most agree that this is not a biblical form of government, yet it is seen in some Baptist churches.¹⁸⁰

The structure of a plurality of elders could vary greatly. Based on a survey of the literature, three main forms can be discerned, though other variations may be found in practice. For the purposes of this study, the three primary variations are shown in see table 1, and termed “Separate Board,”¹⁸¹ “First among Equals,”¹⁸² and “Uniform.”¹⁸³ The variations are typically in terms of authority (both amount and type) compared with the

¹⁷⁸ Waldron, “Plural Elder Congregationalism,” 214-16. The responsibility of oversight, or ruling, is demonstrated in the synonymous title *ἐπισκοπος* and passages including Acts 20:25-28, Titus 1:5-7, 1 Pet 5:1-2. The ability to teach is included in both lists of qualifications found in 1 Tim 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. Furthermore, while 1 Tim 5:17 indicates some difference in the amount of teaching, it does not make a distinction between teaching and ruling elders.

¹⁷⁹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 934.

¹⁸⁰ Akin, “The Single Elder-Led Church,” 54, 57.

¹⁸¹ Though he does not use the term “elder,” nor does he advocate for plurality of elders, this model seems to be what Malphurs describes as he advocates for a church board, listing requirements and responsibilities very similar to biblical elders while retaining a very distinct senior pastor. In such a model, the board can be either there to assist the pastor or to oversee him. See Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 213-18. Many SBC churches may already be functioning with a similar model but with deacons in place of elders. See Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 931-32. If the distinction between the pastor and other elders is very clearly delineated, then this model resembles a Presbyterian model of one teaching elder with ruling elders. That model would be the third-office model that Wring critiques in his dissertation. Wring, “An Examination of the Practice of Elder Rule,” 152ff.

¹⁸² Many advocates for plural elders either allow for this model or recommend it. Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1995), 45-50. Merkle, *40 Questions*, 173-76. Dever, *A Display of God’s Glory*, 23-24. The difference between this model and the separate board is the level of distinction and authority of senior or lead pastor and the rest of the elders.

¹⁸³ Strauch describes this kind of uniform model before moving to address first among equals. In such a model, there is no designated official point person or first among equals, but instead the elders lead in their areas of gifting. As Strauch notes, one of those gifting may be leadership, which results in a first among equals. Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1995), 35-44. Admittedly, this uniform model will probably be rare in existing churches that transition to plural elders, however, co-pastors or leadership from a uniform team of elders/pastors may be found.

other elders, responsibility (both amount and type) compared with the other elders, and visibility to the congregation compared with the other elders.

Table 1. Plural elder structures

	Separate Board o oooo	First among Equals ooo*oo	Uniform o-o-o-o-o
Description	Pastor is assisted, advised or overseen by group	A group of elders with a clear primary leader	A relatively indistinct group of elders
Authority	Different, or mostly with pastor	Shared	Shared, but unique
Responsibility	Mostly on Pastor	Shared, but unique	Shared, but unique
Visibility	Almost all on Pastor	Slightly more on primary	Shared, but unique

These structures could be further varied by the general amount of time given in service (full-time vs. part-time), a differing amount of remuneration received from the church, the education required, the total number of elders, and so on. For example, Dever advocates for a first among equals structure in which multiple elders, but not the majority, are paid staff of the church.¹⁸⁴ Since the resurgence of plural elders is a more recent phenomenon in this denomination, structures in Southern Baptist churches are likely to be quite distinct from other congregations as the movement grows.

Another factor required for a polity to be considered plural elder congregational is the authority and autonomy of the congregation. Waldron again points out a spectrum for this issue that ranges between an elder board that advises the congregation who continues to vote on a majority of issues to a congregation that elects or approves the

¹⁸⁴ Dever, *A Display of God's Glory*, 21-24.

elders and then is subject to their decisions.¹⁸⁵ While proponents seem to agree that plural eldership should not eliminate congregationalism, the exact line of what it means to be congregational is not settled.¹⁸⁶ Some feel that church autonomy is the distinguishing characteristic between plural elder congregationalism and a Presbyterian government.¹⁸⁷ Others feel that congregationalism is marked by both autonomy *and* democracy in which every member has a say in the church's affairs.¹⁸⁸ Therefore, autonomy seems to be the baseline definition of congregationalism while a church's authority structure is variable.¹⁸⁹ This concept of congregational autonomy with varying degrees of authority has led to an informal distinction between an "elder-led" church and an "elder-ruled" church. Akin differentiates between elder-rule and elder-leadership, in that elder-leadership remains congregational.¹⁹⁰ Dever also tries to make the distinction clear along the same lines as Akin.¹⁹¹ Again, however, what it means to remain congregational, and therefore what it means to have "elder-rule" is debatable. In general, "elder-led" refers to churches that have a plurality of elders but the congregation still votes at least on the major issues

¹⁸⁵ Waldron, "Plural Elder Congregationalism," 193.

¹⁸⁶ Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 57.

¹⁸⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 934.

¹⁸⁸ Erikson, *Christian Theology*, 1089.

¹⁸⁹ Dever writes,

Almost every gathering of believers is congregational to some degree, whatever the formal structure of government. Even a church in which the congregation only holds title to the property is in some sense a congregationally governed church. In that case, the congregation could always decide simply to pull the plug on the whole thing if they did not agree with their leaders' decisions. Even more is a church considered congregational if the congregation has the final say in issues of budget or the call of a pastor. Add to that the congregation as the final court of appeal in terms of doctrine and discipline, disputes and membership, and you begin to have a congregational church not unlike the models given us in the New Testament. (Dever, *A Display of God's Glory*, 37)

¹⁹⁰ In Wring's article Akin here affirms and supports elder leadership, but not elder rule. Wring, "An Examination of the Practice of Elder Rule," 106.

¹⁹¹ Dever, *By Whose Authority?*, 34.

(major financial concerns, elder level personnel decisions, constitution changes, etc.), while “elder-ruled” seems to refer to congregations that elect or approve their elders and are then subject to their decisions with limited input. Table 2 illustrates this spectrum of congregational involvement.

Table 2. Elder-led vs. elder-ruled congregational governments

“Elder-led” ¹⁹²		“Elder-ruled” ¹⁹³	
Elders advise the church that then votes on almost all issues	Church votes on major issues only and leaves the rest to elders	Church votes only on approval of elders, then leaves the rest to them	Church never votes but retains autonomy, elders self-perpetuate
High Congregational Involvement	Some Congregational Involvement	Little Congregational Involvement	No Congregational Involvement

It is along this elder-led versus elder-ruled line that much frustration seems to be caused in Southern Baptist churches transitioning to plural elders. All of these relationships between elders and the congregation are considered as plural elder congregationalism for this study. The results show what type of plural elder structure First Baptist has transitioned to and may help inform the debate on plural elder structures remaining congregational.

Responsibilities of Elders

It is also important to understand the responsibilities of a group of elders. Many pastors are recognizing the advantages of having plural elders to help fill in the gaps.¹⁹⁴ When listing the responsibilities of an elder, advocates of a plural elder model tend to

¹⁹² Advocates for elder-led systems of government include Dever, *By Whose Authority*, 32-36; Newton, *Elders in the Life of the Church*, 76-81; and Waldron, “Plural Elder Congregationalism,” 210-12.

¹⁹³ Advocates for elder-rule systems of government include MacArthur, “Answering the Key Questions”; and Strauch, *Biblical Eldership*, but Strauch would assert that good elders would know the views of their congregation on matters and consider them. Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1995), 283.

¹⁹⁴ Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 40.

lean on the biblical text much more than any current leadership theories or models. Each contemporary writer bases their list of elder responsibilities on what they see modeled in Scripture. Lists differ slightly but each could be categorized into three basic functions of elders: teaching, leading, and shepherding.¹⁹⁵ An elder is expected to teach, lead, and shepherd the local congregation. Teaching includes preaching and instruction. It is expected that the elders educate the people in sound doctrine. The elders must also lead, manage, and govern the church. This is best described as general oversight. They have been given charge of the church. They should make decisions as a group and pursue consensus on what is best for the church.¹⁹⁶ They are also charged with soul-care of the members of the congregation. Johnson writes, “Great responsibility rested on these rulers for they watched for the souls of their flock.”¹⁹⁷ In larger congregations, this may take on more of an oversight or training role than a hands-on approach. Shepherding also includes church discipline as elders help decide the fate of unruly members. Table 3 provides lists of elder responsibilities. Other authors include slightly different lists, but most responsibilities can still be reduced to these categories.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁵ Some would see these basic elder functions mirrored in the roles of Christ as prophet, priest, and king. Nicholas Osterman applies the threefold role of Christ as prophet, priest, and king to the role of the pastor (as a continued ministry of Christ), but goes a step further by taking the natural pastoral leaning toward one of the roles and using it to advocate for shared leadership and plurality of elders in the church: “It is not difficult to imagine the fruit that can come when all three types of leaders work together to fully complement one another.” Nicholas John Osterman, “A Triperspectival Approach to Shared Pastoral Leadership Based on the *munus Triplex Christi*” (EdD thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 74. John Johnson sees a precedent for these roles for a modern minister (along with that of a sage) in their respective Old Testament functions, but stops short of attributing them to NT elders. Though he does not advocate for the complementary nature of plural elders, he does acknowledge that each individual will have a leaning toward one of these roles over the other. John Johnson, “The Old Testament Offices as Paradigm for Pastoral Identity,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152, no. 606 (1995): 182-200. However, not everyone sees the *munus triplex* as a pastoral leadership typology, at least not as individual gifting or persuasions. Dan Allender writes, “We are to be all three, all at once. To lead is to mirror Jesus in all three of these capacities.” Dan Allender, *Leading with a Limp* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2006), 187.

¹⁹⁶ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 180.

¹⁹⁷ Johnson, *The Gospel Developed*, 78.

¹⁹⁸ Strauch lists elder responsibilities as protecting the flock, feeding the flock, leading the flock, and caring for practical needs. Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1995), 17-31. Newton lists doctrine, discipline,

Table 3. Lists of elder responsibilities

	Allison ¹⁹⁹	MacArthur ²⁰⁰	Piper ²⁰¹	Grudem ²⁰²	Merkle ²⁰³
Teach	Teach sound doctrine	Preach and teach	Teach	Teach, instruct	Teach
Lead	Authoritatively lead the church	Oversee affairs of the church	Govern (+ shepherd)	Govern, rule, manage	Lead
					Equip
Shepherd	Shepherd the people	Partner in prayer			
	Pray for healing	Shepherd			

Waldron argues for both parity and diversity among the elders in these tasks.²⁰⁴ Since the elders are equal in authority and responsibility, all elders should (1) visit and counsel the flock, (2) participate in membership interviews, (3) help set church policy, (4) receive oversight from the other elders, (5) be equally eligible to lead the observance of the ordinances, (6) be equally eligible to represent the church in associations, and (7) must understand sound doctrine and be able to teach and defend it.²⁰⁵ However, since all the elders also possess unique gifts and abilities, some elders may (1) have a larger share of the pulpit, (2) do more visiting and counseling, (3) have a higher profile in church administration, (4) have wider influence, (5) not all have the same job description, and

direction, distinction (modeling a Christian life). Newton, *Elders in the Life of the Church*, 54-57.

¹⁹⁹ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 589.

²⁰⁰ MacArthur, "Answering Key Questions."

²⁰¹ Piper, "Biblical Eldership."

²⁰² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 915.

²⁰³ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 89.

²⁰⁴ Waldron, "Plural Elder Congregationalism," 214-17.

²⁰⁵ Nichols develops this list as he explores the idea of parity further in the first chapter of the shared work on parity of eldership. Greg Nichols, "Parity and Diversity in the Eldership," in Samuel E. Waldron et al., *In Defense of Parity: A Presentation of the Parity or Equality of Elders in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Truth for Eternity, 1997).

(6) not all have the same salary from the church.²⁰⁶ In this way, the responsibilities of the elders should be both equal and unique, distributed among the biblical functions of teaching, leading, and shepherding.

Qualifications for Elders

When it comes to the qualifications of elders, the Bible presents some clear expectations for each elder, but even some of these have been fodder for debate. The apostle Paul provides two very similar lists in 1 Timothy and Titus:

It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires to do. An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. He must be one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), and not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. And he must have a good reputation with those outside the church, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. (1 Tim 3:1-7)

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. (Titus 1:5-9)

Both lists consist almost entirely of character qualities. Carson points out that with the exception of not being a recent convert (relative to the congregation) and being able to teach (grasping the gospel and ability to communicate it), what is mandated for the elders is elsewhere required of every believer.²⁰⁷ The assumption, however, is that not every man possesses these qualities, but elders *must* be these things to be considered for the office.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Nichols follows the idea of parity with these examples of diversity in Nichols, "Parity and Diversity in the Eldership," in Waldron et al., *In Defense of Parity*.

²⁰⁷ Carson, "Church, Authority in the," 249.

²⁰⁸ Waldron, "Plural Elder Congregationalism," 213.

Since the lists are so straight-forward, they cause little disagreement among scholars and congregations regarding their interpretation.²⁰⁹ One exception to the relative agreement is the qualifications regarding family. First, Paul states that a man must be a husband of one wife.²¹⁰ This issue has led churches to a range of interpretations.²¹¹ Can a single man be an elder? Can a widowed, remarried man? Can a divorced man? Scholars seem to agree that this general statement may be best interpreted as a “one-woman man”—no girlfriends, prostitutes, slave-girls, etc.²¹² Even though many churches prohibit men who have been divorced from holding the office, this does not appear to be the direction of Paul and should probably be handled on a case by case basis. The issue at the heart of Paul’s comment is the man’s faithfulness to his wife if he has one.²¹³ A further question arises with the requirements of a godly household. Can a man with unbelieving or unruly children be an elder? Scholars seem to agree that “having children who believe” in Titus

²⁰⁹ While the majority of the content of these lists has not been a source of contention, their application has been debated. Fee makes the case that the pastoral epistles were never intended to be a manual on how to do church, but that Paul’s letter to Timothy was an answer to the specific situation in Ephesus and therefore these qualifications can only be generally applied. Gordon Fee, “Reflections on Church Order in the Pastoral Epistles, with Further Reflection on the Hermeneutics of *Ad Hoc* Documents,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 28, no. 2 (June 1985), 141-52. While agreeing with Fee’s assessment and admitting that Timothy’s list is specific to the situation in Ephesus and certainly not comprehensive, Merkle argues that the lists of qualifications are non-negotiable for an Elder in the church. Benjamin Merkle, “Are the Qualifications for Elders or Overseers Negotiable?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171, no. 682 (April-June 2014): 172-88.

²¹⁰ This phrase has been notoriously difficult to translate over the history of the church. In the original it is *μίας γυναίχός ἄνδρα*, literally “a man of one woman” or “husband of one wife” since the Greek for man and husband, woman and wife are synonymous and left to context. Knight, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 157.

²¹¹ Merkle lists four possible interpretations: (1) an overseer must be married, (2) an overseer must not be a polygamist, (3) an overseer must be married only one time his entire life, and (4) an overseer must be faithful to his wife. Merkle favors the interpretation of faithfulness to one’s wife. Merkle, “Are the Qualifications for Elders or Overseers Negotiable?,” 182.

²¹² Getz, *Elders and Leaders*, 165. Knight agrees with this interpretation and believes the phrase to mean a man who has been faithful to his marriage vows excluding polygamy, concubinage, and promiscuous indulgence. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 157-59.

²¹³ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 128. This position is held by many scholars in addition to Merkle. See Merkle, “Are the Qualifications for Elders or Overseers Negotiable?,” 183n29.

could be better translated as “faithful” children, which sets a slightly different standard and better mirrors the passage in 1 Timothy that paints the picture of an under control household.²¹⁴ The elder was to first demonstrate his leadership skills at home. These skills closely matched what would be needed in the church. In fact, the term *elder* seems appropriate for Christian leadership because it approximates the family character in contrast to hierarchy or sacred titles.²¹⁵

Another area of some controversy over elders in the church is whether the Bible permits women to be elders. Both of the above lists of qualifications seem to assume that elders are men. Merkle gives an excellent treatment of this issue in his work.²¹⁶ He makes a case for both sides and then arrives at the opinion that only men should be considered for eldership. Grudem agrees in saying that women are of equal value to the church but should not be made pastors or elders.²¹⁷ Southern Baptist churches are the subject of this study and the convention has made its stance clear in the most recent version of the Baptist Faith and Message, which states that only men qualify to be considered pastors.²¹⁸ Therefore, it is unlikely that any churches that qualify for this study wrestled with this issue, but some may have.

²¹⁴ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 132. πιστά here most likely means “faithful.” A man being considered for elder should not have rebellious children still living at home. Knight, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 289-90.

²¹⁵ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1988), 19.

²¹⁶ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 135-57.

²¹⁷ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 937. Some evangelical scholars disagree and believe women could be considered for eldership. In general, they see Paul’s objection as a problem in just Ephesus and therefore do not believe that such a prohibition would apply today. Gordon Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 76-7. F. F. Bruce, “Women in the Church: A Biblical Survey,” *Christian Brethren Review* 33 (1982): 7-14. John Stott, *Issues Facing Christianity Today* (Basingstoke, UK: Marshalls, 1984), 254.

²¹⁸ The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message says, “Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture.” The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message, Article VI, accessed January 21, 2016, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>.

One more area of note is a qualification that these biblical lists do not mention—age. Since the word *elder* literally means “older” and the original concept of this type of leadership was based on advanced age and experience,²¹⁹ it would be easy to assume that only older men could hold the office. However, no current writers give an elder a minimum age requirement. Instead, their focus, as was Paul’s, is on spiritual maturity and congregational respect,²²⁰ which could conceivably happen at a relatively young stage of life, but the possibility certainly increases with age.

Appointing Elders

There is not much record in the New Testament on the details of elder appointment other than the fact that they were appointed in each church. The process for appointing elders was different in the New Testament church where the people chose their leaders rather than in the synagogue where it was based on seniority.²²¹ Historically, there have been two means of appointment: selection by a higher authority (Episcopal governments) and selection by the congregation (protestant governments).²²² Since Southern Baptist churches are autonomous, modern elders will likely be selected by the congregation and/or by the existing local elders.²²³ Plural-elder advocates who are in favor of maintaining congregationalism offer the election or approval of elders rather than a self-perpetuating group as a means to that end.²²⁴

²¹⁹ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1988), 39.

²²⁰ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 115.

²²¹ Erikson, *Christian Theology*, 1086.

²²² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 920.

²²³ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 199.

²²⁴ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 933-34. See also n61 in this chap. for the justification some use for voting for elders.

To be appointed an elder, a man should express the desire, meet the qualifications, and then be examined.²²⁵ If the man is found to be qualified (by whatever means the church uses), he should then be publicly recognized. The biblical process may or may not have had ceremony attached to it. It most likely involved either a formal or informal “laying on of hands,” as Paul warns Timothy in 1 Timothy 5:22 to not go through that process too soon, presumably the act of appointing an elder.²²⁶ Most proponents agree that ordination (in terms of endorsing them for ministry in other local churches) is not necessary, but a public recognition is.²²⁷ Officers need public recognition to properly perform their duties.²²⁸ Elders may then either stay indefinitely or be on a fixed term limit.²²⁹

Another issue of appointment is the number of elders a church needs. The biblical model only presents a plurality, but never gives a specific number or pattern. Today, there are three primary ways in which a church may limit the number of elders.²³⁰ The fixed number system sets a definite number of elders for a given congregation. Some consider it dangerous to set a fixed number for a church.²³¹ The church may grow and need more or there might not be enough qualified individuals available, tempting the church to

²²⁵ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1988), 78.

²²⁶ Given the context of elders in this passage along with Paul’s other usage of “laying on of hands” and in the book of Acts, this is naturally understood to be the public means by which elders were recognized. Knight, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 239.

²²⁷ Strauch believes a modern ordination is not necessary because becoming an elder is not a holy rite: “Appointment confers no special grace or empowerment, nor does one become a priest, cleric, or holy man at the moment of installation.” Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1995), 85. Instead, he prefers a simple public appointment. Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1995), 284-88. Merkle agrees with this balance of appointing without necessarily ordaining. Merkle, *40 Questions*, 209-12.

²²⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 905.

²²⁹ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 204.

²³⁰ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 166.

²³¹ Zens, “The Major Concepts of Eldership,” 29.

settle for someone who is less than qualified. The ratio system is much more common. It establishes a “one elder per” rule that the church then follows as it grows. There is a similar danger here of appointing an unqualified individual just to meet a ratio. Finally, an open system does not set quotas. It simply looks for qualified men to appoint as elders. This system seems to best match the biblical data by allowing the church to recognize who qualifies rather than being worried about numbers.

Biblical Deacons

Baptists have affirmed two offices in the church—elders and deacons. Most point to Acts 6 as the biblical basis for the diaconate.²³² Elders were to give spiritual oversight while deacons performed practical ministry.²³³ Deacons were responsible to serve the church in a variety of ways but were not required to teach as elders were.²³⁴ In the typical single elder polity of most Southern Baptist churches, there is only one elder (the senior pastor) and a group of deacons. This group of deacons minister in a variety of ways depending on the needs of the church and the pastor. They often serve as an advisory board for the pastor and could even function like a system of plural elders if the deacons actually rule with the pastor.²³⁵ A transition to plural elders will most likely cause some change to the role of the deacons. Some churches may transition with the deacon board intact and add elders, they may simply change the name of the deacon board to elders, or they may start from scratch. It could be a significant obstacle to overcome in a transition if deacons that once had power in the church are asked to give it up.²³⁶ It is also possible

²³² Dever, *A Display of God's Glory*, 22.

²³³ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 589-90.

²³⁴ Carson, “Church, Authority in the,” 250.

²³⁵ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 932.

²³⁶ Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 116.

that some churches may begin to include women in the deaconate as a result of the change. If the deacon office moves from a ruling capacity to a serving capacity, perhaps these churches who have studied biblical eldership will now include (if they had not before) women as deacons.²³⁷

Organizational Change

This study is about plurality of elders, and therefore a general understanding of the plural elder system is necessary. However, since this study is also about changing the government of a church, a theoretical understanding of plural elders is not enough. Any church wishing to transition to a new government must also have a grasp on organizational change. Change is difficult. It is uncomfortable. It can lead to wonderful new opportunities or horrible results. This is certainly true in the church. If not handled properly, major changes in a church can put an end to a previously successful ministry. Change must be made deliberately and thoughtfully through careful planning and execution. The study of organizational change in both secular and church contexts clearly establishes a set of best practices when approaching extensive change. A church must adhere to key elements if it is going to see a successful transition to plural elders. Churches that follow these principles should make an effective transition while those who ignore them will fail.

The field of organizational change seemingly began with Kurt Lewin's simple solution to thinking about the change process differently. In 1947, he described a three-

²³⁷ Grudem writes,

If deacons are actually functioning as elders and have the highest governing authority within a local church . . . it would follow that Scripture does not permit women to be deacons in this sense. On the other hand, if deacons simply have delegated administrative responsibility for certain aspects of the ministry of the church, then there seems to be no good reason to prevent women from functioning as deacons. (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 944)

stage model of change: unfreeze, move, freeze.²³⁸ The genius of this model was the recognition that change does not simply happen within an organization. Attempting to change without the proper preparation is futile. William Bridges' *Managing Transitions* is a more recent work that similarly highlights the difference between changes (which are situational in nature) and transitions (which are psychological in nature).²³⁹ The people within the organization, especially those affected by change, must first be ready for change and appropriate planning must take place. In 1996, John Kotter more thoroughly illustrated the entire process of change in his popular book, *Leading Change*.²⁴⁰ Building on that work, Mike Bonem, James H. Furr, and Jim Herrington's *Leading Congregational Change* is a similar process implemented with an association of churches in Houston.²⁴¹ They make some necessary adjustments to Kotter's work so that it better fits a congregation. These basic change processes are summarized in table 4.

Table 4. Change processes

Lewin	Kotter	Bonem, Furr, Herrington
		Personal Preparation
Unfreeze	Create Urgency	Create Urgency
Change	Guiding Coalition	Vision Community
	Develop Vision	Discern Vision
	Communicate Vision	Communicate Vision
	Empower Employees	Empower Leaders
	Short Term Wins	Implement Vision
Freeze	Consolidate Wins	Momentum through Alignment
	Anchor in Culture	

²³⁸ Kurt Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics: Concept, Method and Reality in Social Science; Social Equilibria and Change," *Human Relations* 1 (June 1947), 34-36.

²³⁹ William Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2009), 3.

²⁴⁰ John Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 1996).

²⁴¹ Mike Bonem, James H. Furr, and Jim Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

These descriptions of change processes, along with other helpful works, provide a strategy for churches planning to change in general. It is not enough to simply desire change. A successful change will come from purposeful steps toward implementing a new culture.

Seeing the need to educate churches in the specific change at hand, two Southern Baptist authors have also applied a process to a church's specific transition to plural elders. Newton advocates a three-phase transition: evaluation, presentation, and implementation.²⁴² Church leadership that desires a change should first assess the structure in place, preferably with the core team of existing leadership. The idea should then be presented to the congregation primarily through exposition and discussion. Finally, the plan should be implemented with much prayer. Merkle believes a church desiring to transition to plural elders should start by (1) entreating the Lord, then (2) establishing trust, (3) evaluating the current leadership structure, 4) educating the congregation, (5) emphasizing qualifications, and then (6) engaging the plan slowly.²⁴³ Both of these men recommend a thoughtful process rather than a rash and haphazard transition. Churches will take different paths toward change, but based on the organizational change literature and the recommendations of these two authors, the following principles are expected in a successful transition to plural elders and were anticipated in the study.

Spiritual Vitality and Atmosphere of Prayer

Spiritual vitality and an atmosphere of prayer will permeate the churches that make successful changes. Bonem, Furr, and Herrington define *spiritual vitality* as “the life-giving power that faithful people experience together as they passionately pursue

²⁴² Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 126.

²⁴³ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 192.

God's vision for their lives."²⁴⁴ This foundation includes observable attitudes such as a passion for God's Word, a desire to reach the lost, a prioritization of God's glory, close fellowship, humble service, and fervent prayer. Spiritual vitality will be found in churches that are encountering God's holiness, experiencing God's grace, embracing their unity, and engaging in community.²⁴⁵ This spiritual vitality cannot simply be inward, private spirituality. A church desiring to change their leadership structure will be in fervent prayer together about God's plans and the proper timing. The spiritual formation that precedes a change must include constant prayer and should heed Paul's advice to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17). Spiritual vitality may also be marked by repentance and forgiveness, and the congregation pulling together in tighter community.²⁴⁶ Spiritual vitality will be most evident in the change leaders themselves. A change of this magnitude should begin with a process of personal preparation.²⁴⁷ Anyone leading the change should be consistently practicing spiritual disciplines, doing honest self-assessment, and praying for the proper pace of change.²⁴⁸ In the midst of strategically planning a change, time is precious, and it could be tempting to gloss over this step and assume the church is prepared. Without the personal preparation of the leadership, the church will likely not be spiritually prepared. Without the spiritual preparation of the church, the change will likely fail.

²⁴⁴ Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 16.

²⁴⁵ Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 16.

²⁴⁶ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 82.

²⁴⁷ Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 29-34.

²⁴⁸ Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 30-33.

Rooted in Shared Values

Building on the overall spiritual health of the church, a successful change of leadership structure will need to be birthed from shared values. Values are passionate, biblical, shared, core beliefs of the congregation.²⁴⁹ Values illustrate what the church believes to be important. If the change being presented clashes with a large portion of the congregation, it should not be pursued. Otherwise, it is destined to fail. One of the most frequent reasons a change fails is a lack of recognition of the need to change because of differing values.²⁵⁰ In terms of a change to a plurality of elders from full congregational rule, many differing values could be seen underlying objections. Most of these clashing values will be seen as fear of change. The congregation may be uncomfortable, fearful of having authority and voting rights taken, and confused about new leadership expectations.²⁵¹ Behind most of these fears is a strong belief in the value of democracy in a church. Core values cannot be changed overnight. If the potential change does not match the values of the church, it should be abandoned or time should be spent finding a shared value in the midst of disagreement. The most likely shared value is an adherence to the leadership model seen in Scripture. Newton and Merkle both recommend introducing the idea of plural elders through exposition for this reason.²⁵² Building on this type of shared value can lead seamlessly into developing a sense of need.

²⁴⁹ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 100.

²⁵⁰ Tupper F. Cawsey, Gene Deszca, and Cynthia A. Ingols, *Organizational Change: An Action-Oriented Toolkit*, 2nd ed (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 130.

²⁵¹ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 188.

²⁵² Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 132. Merkle, *40 Questions*, 193-94. In his 2014 DMin project, Jason Rolan demonstrated through pre-preaching series surveys and post-preaching series surveys that preaching did make a difference in the congregation's view of plurality of elders. Jason Eugene Rolan, "Using Expository Preaching for Discovering, Developing, and Deploying Elders at Believers' Baptist Church" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

Sense of Need

Another factor that must be present is the desire to change. Most of the current literature follows Kotter’s lead and terms this idea as “urgency.”²⁵³ Creating a sense of urgency makes it clear that the status quo is unacceptable and solidifies the shared belief that change is necessary.²⁵⁴ Bridges writes, “The first task of transition management is to convince people to leave home.”²⁵⁵ There may be a great spiritual vitality and shared values in the congregation, but unless people actually see the need to change, they will not likely be willing to do so. According to Kotter, this is where most transitions fail—leaders simply allow too much complacency.²⁵⁶ There are several ways to create this sense of urgency in the congregation.²⁵⁷ First, the change leadership could take advantage of a crisis or “create” a crisis to demonstrate the need for change. In changing a church’s leadership structure, this may likely be the departure of a pastor. Second, the urgency could be built around a shared value, as explained previously. Third, the urgency could happen through the presence of a transformational leader. Transformational leaders are known for their charisma and ability to rally a group of individuals toward a common goal. Fourth, urgency could be created through common goals. Where values build on a shared belief behind what is important and push the change, goals reach for a common belief of what is important and pull the change along as the group moves toward a desired destination. Finally, urgency could be created through information and education. This could happen through Bible studies, seminars, or sermons. It is expected that a mixture of these methods are present in a church transition of leadership structure. While the literature does not indicate that some methods are more effective than others, it may be

²⁵³ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 35.

²⁵⁴ Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 40.

²⁵⁵ Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 37.

²⁵⁶ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 4.

²⁵⁷ Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols, *Organizational Change*, 112ff.

shown that certain ways to build urgency for a leadership change are indeed more successful. No matter the method, the successful change will be preceded by a sense of urgency. Urgency does not imply that the transition should be moved through as quickly as possible, it is simply making certain that the congregation sees the need for moving from the status quo.

Recommended or Approved by a Diverse Group

Much of the change literature suggests using teams through a transition or at least ensuring that the change is backed by a large, influential group. Changes that have only the backing of an individual or very small group are not likely to succeed. An exception is early in the life of a church plant where the pastor would still have incredible influence.²⁵⁸ In most every other setting, a group of people backing the change will be necessary. This group could be in the form of a vision community that helps to discern the details of the vision.²⁵⁹ It could be a team that simply helps guide the change and provides feedback from the congregation.²⁶⁰ With the case of changing leadership structure, the vision for change is probably going to be relatively rigid. While a team could certainly be included to hammer out the details and decide the methods of transition, the ultimate purpose is more for buy-in and support than actually laying out the vision of change. Sometimes, it may just mean gaining the support of very influential people in the church. This could include, but is not limited to, the church board, the pastor, the staff, or the leader(s) of an influential family.²⁶¹ Having the backing of a group of influential

²⁵⁸ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 212.

²⁵⁹ Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 41-48.

²⁶⁰ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 58-62.

²⁶¹ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 56-57.

individuals, whether they have been placed on a team or just sought out, will be necessary for the potential change to be successful.

Humble Change Leadership Helping through Transition

While it could be easy to see the leaders of such a change as hard-charging and driven, it will also be necessary for them to possess humility and patience. Trusting the leadership guiding the transition will be paramount.²⁶² Earning the people's trust will come from understanding that people will not just be changing to something new, they will also be saying goodbye to something old. Any transition starts with an ending and failure to identify and get ready for endings is the largest problem with transition.²⁶³ To properly lead through a time of transition, leaders must identify who is losing something, acknowledge the importance of the loss to those people, and be ready for overreaction and grieving for it.²⁶⁴ In the case of changing leadership structure, there is much potential loss. For example, if a church follows a biblical pattern of eldership and chooses to not allow women as elders, many women who once had greater influence in the church through the democratic process may now feel as if they have a limited say in decisions. Others who do not feel they meet the qualifications of elder may also feel that their contribution to decision making has been taken away. Some may feel that the structure of the church was part of its heritage that they helped to establish. A successful transition will handle these feelings with humility and compassion and acknowledge them in the open while continuing to point to the shared values and the vision and reasoning for change.

²⁶² Newton believes this to be so true that he recommends a pastor not introducing a potential change to plural eldership until he has established trust with the congregation. Newton, *Elders in the Life of the Church*, 169.

²⁶³ Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 7-8.

²⁶⁴ Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 25-30.

Proper Timing

In periods of transition, timing can be everything. The key to successful timing of a leadership structure transition will be properly assessing the readiness of the congregation.²⁶⁵ An examination of many failed transitions would likely reveal that they were pushed along too quickly and attempted before the congregation was ready. Proper time expectations must be set for a successful transition.²⁶⁶ A transition of church polity should not be rushed.²⁶⁷ Merkle believes the typical transition to a plurality of elders should take between eighteen months and three years.²⁶⁸ A major, difficult change, may mean three to ten years.²⁶⁹ Lewin's early model of change is appropriate here as he describes the first stage of transition as "unfreezing."²⁷⁰ Time must be taken to thaw out the existing status quo and ensure that everyone is ready to move. Proper timing is not just about the duration of change, however. It also means that the change is being made in the proper time of the life of the church. Handy's sigmoid curve illustrates that change should occur while the organization is growing, before it has hit a plateau or is dying.²⁷¹ A new curve should begin before the existing one peaks.²⁷² Leaders must ask if the church is ready for such a change before attempting to make it happen. Patience is necessary but so is a willingness to move when it is time. Bridges explains, "Whatever must end, must end. Do not drag it out. Plan it carefully, and once it is done, allow time for healing. But

²⁶⁵ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 66.

²⁶⁶ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 76-77.

²⁶⁷ Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life*, 113.

²⁶⁸ Merkle, *40 Questions*, 195.

²⁶⁹ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 77.

²⁷⁰ Lewin, "Frontiers in Group Dynamics," 34.

²⁷¹ Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols, *Organizational Change*, 44.

²⁷² Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 12.

the action itself should be sufficiently large to get the job done.”²⁷³ Proper timing is knowing when to take action, not just following a prescribed plan. Tupper Cawsey, Gene Deszca, and Cynthia Ingols write, “Change leaders understand the need to balance patience and impatience.”²⁷⁴ It can be difficult to balance this need for patience and urgency. It will be different from one congregation to the next. Readiness for change will be based on a multitude of factors, including previous change experiences, leadership, openness to change, and systems currently in place.²⁷⁵ A successful transition will be marked by the proper timing through change leadership who were patient then took necessary action.

Strategic Planning

A change of this magnitude does not happen by accident. To properly move from one structure to another will take solid strategic planning. An examination of failed transitions will often reveal that a lack of planning was the cause. Strategy can be defined as the process of determining how to accomplish the mission.²⁷⁶ The basic strategic plan will consist of a simple gap analysis of where the organization is versus where it needs to be and what it will take to get there.²⁷⁷ The strategic plan dictates how the mission and vision will be accomplished. In the case of a change in leadership structure, the vision can be laid out in one vision path, which can then be broken into action plans and goals.²⁷⁸ Often, the lack of this strategic plan can be another factor that blocks recognition of the need for change. If a strategy that will work better than the one in place is not offered,

²⁷³ Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 37.

²⁷⁴ Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols, *Organizational Change*, 24.

²⁷⁵ Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols, *Organizational Change*, 110.

²⁷⁶ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 167.

²⁷⁷ Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols, *Organizational Change*, 47.

²⁷⁸ Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 78-79.

some will oppose the change.²⁷⁹ The key is that the actions being taken clearly line up with the vision.²⁸⁰ Moving forward in a large transition without a plan would condemn the change to failure.

Clear and Frequent Communication to Congregation

Communication is so important to the change process that Malphurs even suggests improving communication before the transition even starts.²⁸¹ Successful transition will be seen not only where there is good communication during the transition, but where good communication existed before it was time for change. Communicating the vision for change is one of the key factors for a successful change. The communication must first be clear. It should be a clear, challenging picture from the heart of what must be.²⁸² Explaining and clarifying purpose and painting a picture helps people make a new beginning.²⁸³ The vision must be clear, but it also must be repeated over and over again.²⁸⁴ Kotter estimates that leaders under-communicate the vision by a factor of 10, 100 or even 1000.²⁸⁵ Repeating information again and again helps people find their way through the unsettling neutral zone of change.²⁸⁶ It is a constant reminder of where things are headed. Too often change fails because leaders assumed that a congregation knew and understand

²⁷⁹ Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols, *Organizational Change*, 130.

²⁸⁰ Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 84.

²⁸¹ Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 62.

²⁸² Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning*, 151.

²⁸³ Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 64-65.

²⁸⁴ Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 88.

²⁸⁵ Kotter, *Leading Change*, 9.

²⁸⁶ Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 32-33.

why change was happening. The literature on change is heavy on the need for clear and frequent communication for a change to be successful.

Maintain Unity through Initial Obstacles

Perhaps one of the clearest indicators of success will be how a congregation handles initial difficulty. In any change, it is necessary to find a way to measure success.²⁸⁷ In the case of a change to plurality of elders, a good indicator will be the general attitude shortly after the transition. Problems will often show up when the elders first make an unpopular decision. The congregation is now expected to submit to the leadership of elders after being a fully democratic environment.²⁸⁸ During the end of this difficult neutral zone of transition, many people will have a desire to turn back to the way things once were.²⁸⁹ Early obstacles could serve as either times of reinforcement and encouragement or times of challenge and discouragement. Collecting feedback from the congregation can help leaders keep their fingers on the pulse of the change.²⁹⁰ Part of leading through change will be to remove the obstacles that can be removed to empower people to change.²⁹¹ Other obstacles will need to be pushed through with determination. Leaders who expect some degree of obstacles and challenge after the decision has been implemented will have set the congregation up for a successful change.

²⁸⁷ Cawsey, Deszca, and Ingols, *Organizational Change*, 328; Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 82-83.

²⁸⁸ Strauch, *Biblical Eldership* (1988), 117.

²⁸⁹ Bridges uses a fitting analogy of the Israelites in the wilderness for this phenomenon. They had left Egypt, but had not yet arrived in the Promised Land, therefore they wanted to turn back. Until people begin to see the benefits of change, they will still struggle through the neutral zone and occasionally want to go back to the old way. Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 43-44.

²⁹⁰ Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 155-56.

²⁹¹ Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 155-56.

Reinforcing New Identity

Finally, as those initial obstacles are overcome, a successful change will see some new collective identity. The transition process is a journey from one identity to another.²⁹² The arrival at the new identity marks a successful change. The final step in change is to reinforce this new identity through alignment.²⁹³ This happens first through finding a way to celebrate a win. In terms of a new church leadership structure, this could mean simply taking time to review with the people how the new structure is working. This also means addressing any further resistance and calling for an ongoing commitment.²⁹⁴ A church with a new identity that is accepted by the congregation can finally count itself as changed.

Transitions do not happen by accident. A successful transition will be a strategic, thoughtful process through key steps. Successful change will be built on spiritual vitality and prayer with shared values in mind. The congregation will see a need for change and the change will be backed by an influential group of people. Those leading change will humbly and compassionately help others through the losses of change and will refrain from pushing too fast, ensuring that the congregation is ready. There will be a strategic plan in place and it will be clearly and frequently communicated to the congregation. As obstacles come, the church will move through them and reinforce the decision that has been made. Change does not happen easily and a congregation that follows these steps, whether intuitively or deliberately, will see a much greater rate of success.

Profile of Current Study

The biblical pattern for local church leadership is a plurality of elders who share authority and responsibility. If this is the biblical norm, then there must also be

²⁹² Bridges, *Managing Transitions*, 43.

²⁹³ Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 85-94.

²⁹⁴ Bonem, Furr, and Herrington, *Leading Congregational Change*, 101-4.

some practical benefits. However, there are most certainly challenges as well. These challenges are compounded by the fact that changing a church's structure is quite difficult. To date, there have been no extensive examination of a Southern Baptist church making a change to plurality of elders. This study contributes to the field of study by examining the transition of one Southern Baptist church, evaluating the change processes used, and highlighting the positives and negatives of a change to plural eldership. The ultimate goal is to inform churches that want to make a change to plurality of elders of the best practices. As expected, this work has also discovered other topics in this field worthy of further study. Chapter 3 highlights the proposed methodology for this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

The literature demonstrates a strong biblical argument for plurality of elders within the local church and yet, this type of government is rare in the Southern Baptist Convention. Even more uncommon are churches who have attempted to transition their polity from the traditional single-elder congregational model to some type of plural-elder government. Some have succeeded. Some have failed. This issue is not just a question of biblical authority. Understanding how a church can change is also vital. The precedent literature has also demonstrated certain best practices during transitions that will facilitate large organizations, like churches, in the change process. The proposed research seeks to build on these foundational ideas by looking at a particular case. This chapter outlines how the research was conducted.

This research was completed using a singular case study method. As a type of qualitative research, a case study seeks to describe a situation or process. Leedy and Ormrod explain, “In a case study, a particular individual, program, or event is studied in depth for a defined period of time.”¹ A case study is appropriate when the main questions are “What happened?” and “How did it happen?”² The study focused on one church’s transition to plurality of elders. The research looked at each stage of the transition and compared methods and results with the precedent literature in an effort to answer the research questions.

¹ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 9th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2010), 137.

² Robert K. Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 5.

Research Questions

The following five research questions guided the study:

1. How did this particular church plan, design, and communicate its transition to plurality of elders?

The precedent literature revealed multiple structures and designs to include a plurality of elders in a church government. Additionally, the advice on organizational change dictated certain methods of communicating these changes to facilitate the process. How did this particular church handle these preliminary steps to their transition?

2. What factors, if any, influenced people in the church to favor such a transition?

Numerous arguments have been made for a church being led by a plurality of elders. Which, if any, of these arguments played a part in members of the congregation being in favor of the transition? Were there other factors in the church's history or the way the transition was handled that contributed to a favorable opinion of such a change?

3. What factors, if any, influenced people in the church to oppose such a transition?

Plenty of arguments have also been made against a plurality of elders. Did any of these arguments influence congregation members negatively toward the transition? Were there other factors in the church's history or the way the transition was handled that contributed to a negative opinion of such a change?

4. How well did the prescribed methods of change work for this transition in this particular church?

A church's transition to plurality of elders can serve as a great example of organizational change. Much has been written on the proper methods to carry out such change. Are there positive or negative examples from this particular transition that echo what the precedent literature has said?

5. What has changed in this particular church after its transition to plurality of elders?

The precedent literature revealed some presumed benefits and potential challenges in a church led by a plurality of elders. Since this particular change took place, has the church witnessed any of these benefits or challenges? Overall, what are the results of the transition?

Design Overview

The particular church chosen for this case study was selected for multiple reasons. First Baptist of Waverly, Ohio, is a relatively typical Southern Baptist Church in a small town. It is moderately sized with approximately 250 people in weekly worship. It was founded during a time of regional growth for the SBC in the 1950s and has enjoyed success with many traditional Southern Baptist programs.³ The church affirmed the transition to plurality of elders approximately two years prior to this research which allowed enough time for results to be evident while remaining recent enough for members to accurately recall the transition process. The church was not selected because it is an extreme or special example of a transition to plurality of elders, but because it represents a relatively ordinary one. As Yin explains, in case study research, one option is to “choose an otherwise ordinary case that has nevertheless been associated with some unusually successful outcome.”⁴ In this particular case, the church moved through the transition with very little of the turmoil seen in other churches that have attempted similar governmental changes.⁵ The case is ordinary in its source but somewhat unique in its result. Finally, the church was also selected because I served as pastor during the

³ More specific history on the church was outlined in the research, especially where it is found to be relevant to the transition to plural elders.

⁴ Yin, *Applications of Case Study Research*, 7.

⁵ For examples, see Hannah Elliott, “Elder Rule Increasing in Baptist Life, and So Is Controversy Over Role,” *Associated Baptist Press*, May 2006, accessed June 14, 2019, <https://baptistnews.com/article/elder-rule-increasing-in-baptist-life-and-so-is-controversy-over-role/#.XQPDDohKgDU>.

transition and therefore have intimate knowledge of the process. This is advantageous in that a participant-observer in a case study can bring out unusual aspects that others may not.⁶ All of these factors presented First Baptist Waverly as a potentially insightful case for understanding an SBC church transitioning to plurality of elders.

The research retrospectively followed the stages of the transition seeking to provide answers to the research questions along the way and concludes with an analysis of the transition in general and the research questions in detail. Chapter 4 provides a narrative of the stages along with insight gained from the research. The stages begin with a historical overview of the church to put the transition into a proper context. That is followed by an examination of how the church conceived and designed the proposed church polity and compares that plan to the precedent literature. The third stage is how the potential transition was announced and how the church was educated regarding the change. That leads naturally to how the church responded and the approval of the transition. The next stage is appointing and confirming the plural elders. Finally, the last stage examines what has happened since the change was made and what may still need done. Chapter 5 then provides an analysis of the research questions and the transition as a whole and seeks to offer advice to churches looking to make a similar transition and lists potential subjects for further research.

Limitations of Generalization

Since the study was limited to a single Southern Baptist church, the findings will not generalize to all churches desiring to make a change to plural elder leadership. Such is the nature of case studies. It is not the intent to generalize to the entire population but to share a particular example.⁷ The intention is to provide examples from the

⁶ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2009), 179.

⁷ Creswell, *Research Design*, 192-93.

precedent literature, not to perfectly generalize to every church. Such generalization would be virtually impossible given the many variables at play. However, the case study will generalize to the particular case and may be transferred to other similar churches with congregational governments desiring to make a change to plurality of elders, especially those in the Southern Baptist Convention. Therefore, the research should provide some guidance to churches wanting to make a similar transition.

Procedures

Several research methods were used to create this case study. A survey of the congregation began the study. The survey was followed by an extensive interview process.⁸ My own observations provided insight into the transition. Additionally, documentation used during the transition was reviewed.

The research began with a survey of people within the congregation. The survey was given to willing participants who were present and active during the transition to plurality of elders. This target for this initial survey was at least sixty-five people from the congregation to assure relatively accurate views of congregational opinions and attitudes.⁹ It was limited to those who were able to vote during the transition per the previous constitution.¹⁰ Further, because of the relatively diverse demographic of the church (in terms of generation and gender) and how that could affect the opinions of the transition, the sampling frame was stratified to approximately match the overall

⁸ All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

⁹ This figure was derived from the formula for proportional survey research of small populations in Louis M. Rea and Richard A. Parker, *Designing and Conducting Survey Research: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 148-49. Sample size calculated at a 95 percent confidence level with a 10 percent margin of error based on a church membership of 200 people.

¹⁰ Only official members of the church above the age of 18 were allowed to vote in this decision. This sample may include some who were able to vote but chose not to do so. The question of whether they voted were included on the survey.

population of the membership of the church.¹¹ Had any strata been significantly under- or over-represented, even after pursuing more participation, adjustments would have been made using appropriate weighting measures and noted in the results. Table 5 shows the targeted sampling strata necessary to mirror the membership make-up of the congregation as a whole.¹² As can be seen in appendix 3, this target was achieved.

Table 5. Strata for First Baptist Waverly survey

Group	Men	%	Sample	Women	%	Sample
Age 20-37	11	5.5	3-4	15	7.5	4-5
Age 38-55	23	11.5	7-8	30	15.0	9-10
Age 56-73	22	11.0	7-8	42	21.0	13-14
Age 74+	20	10.0	6-7	37	18.5	12-13
		Total	24-25		Total	40-41

The survey sought to discover the general attitude of the congregation before, during, and after the transition to the new church government. It used both multiple choice and open ended questions along with a “venting” question at the end of the survey.¹³ The responses to open-ended questions were coded with both predetermined and emerging codes to analyze the data.¹⁴ The survey’s contents were validated by another pastor that had led a church through the same transition and field tested with several church

¹¹ Rea and Parker, *Designing and Conducting Survey Research*, 166-67.

¹² The current active membership of First Baptist Waverly is approximately 200. Ages reflect current ages (2 years after the transition) and were chosen to approximate the generally accepted generational lines found at Pew Research Center, “The Whys and Hows of Generations Research,” September 2015, accessed June 14, 2019, <https://www.people-press.org/2015/09/03/the-whys-and-hows-of-generations-research/>.

¹³ Rea and Parker, *Designing and Conducting Survey Research*, 46.

¹⁴ Creswell, *Research Design*, 184.

members before distribution. The survey was administered in both paper and online form.¹⁵ While surveys are not common in case studies, one was used to begin this research for several reasons. First, it served as a set of data that helped validate my own observations and interviews.¹⁶ Second, the survey provided data on the attitude of the congregation as a whole. These congregational opinions revealed areas of inquiry for more in-depth study. Finally, this initial survey discovered opinionated and willing participants that would make for insightful interviews. The survey was analyzed looking for common trends, beliefs, and attitudes that helped formulate questions for the interview protocol.

The survey was followed by extensive interviews of people involved in the church during the transition to plurality of elders, including several different groups of people. First, the committee that planned and designed the governance structure was interviewed. This group consisted of five congregationally-elected individuals and all of them were sought out for an interview. They were asked about how they came to an understanding of the new church polity, along with the process of planning and announcing the proposed transition. They were also asked about whether the process went as they expected. The second group of interviews was a representative sampling of the general congregation. The participants for this interview, none of which were interviewed in the other groups, were selected by me, based on the perceived ability to provide insight into the trends and phenomena witnessed in the initial congregational survey, other interviews, or precedent literature. The target was eight to twelve congregants to interview, and, ultimately, nine were selected. These interviews sought to gain the perspective of average members as they went through the process. A final set of interviews was with the men

¹⁵ Because of the church's wide age demographic and varying access to computers, providing the survey in different forms increased participation and accuracy. The survey was identical in both forms.

¹⁶ This strategy was an attempt within a case study to internally validate the information by going beyond the researcher's observations to "triangulate" the data. Creswell, *Research Design*, 191.

ultimately named as elders to get their opinions on the transition, changes that have been made as a result, and even areas that may still need to change. The interview with the elders was performed as a focus group with all of them interviewing together. All interviews were done in person with a semi-structured interview protocol. In a semi-structured interview, the research may follow a set of standard questions with individually-tailored questions for clarification and follow-up.¹⁷ The questions for the interview protocol of each group were written based on the precedent literature and initial congregational survey. The interviews were recorded with permission from the participants and were transcribed. Transcriptions were openly coded with both predetermined and emerging codes. The protocols for each interview and the transcriptions are available in Appendices E-J.

The research method most closely associated with case study is observation of the researcher. This observation provided insight and analysis from throughout the transition. In this particular case, I was also a guiding participant. With the role of observer secondary to that of participant, it is recognized and acknowledged that there may have been some bias involved in the observations. This bias was diluted through the use of the other research methods and I was intentional about looking at the transition objectively. The situation also has its advantages. According to Creswell, this type of case study research can bring out unusual aspects that others may not.¹⁸ I was well versed in plurality of elders and transition methods before leading the congregation through this transition and have a significant history with this church. These factors contributed to insightful observation that helped evaluate the theories put forth in the precedent literature and add to the knowledge base of best practices for other churches to use in a similar transition.

¹⁷ Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 188.

¹⁸ Creswell, *Research Design*, 179.

Documentation from throughout the transition was also reviewed looking for consistency with the committee's intentions and the congregation's experience during the transition. This documentation included the previous constitution and by-laws, pastoral history, training materials given to the committee, the text of the new constitution, sermons, studies, Q&A sessions, letters to the congregation, any minutes from the meetings during the transition, nomination forms, and elder training materials. This documentation review served to validate procedures and general feelings during the transition and reflected findings within the precedent literature.

Conclusion for the Proposed Methodology

Church transitions to a plurality of elders are virtually unstudied, especially in Southern Baptist circles.¹⁹ This research took a closer look at the process. This methodological design sought to describe the experience of one church's transition to a new church polity that includes a plurality of elders. The research questions guided the study:

1. How did this particular church plan, design, and communicate its transition to plurality of elders?
2. What factors, if any, influenced people in the church to favor such a transition?
3. What factors, if any, influenced people in the church to oppose such a transition?
4. How well did the prescribed methods of change work for this transition in this particular church?
5. What has changed in this particular church after its transition to plurality of elders?

The research used multiple case study methods:

1. Survey: multiple choice and open-ended questions to a stratified sample of the church
2. Interview: one-on-one transcribed discussions with individuals from several groups:

¹⁹ Newton and Merkle both advocate processes for transitioning to plural elders in Southern Baptist Churches (as discussed in chap. 2), but there have been no known studies on the results of such transitions. Evans and Godwin document the transition at their church, but it is not a Southern Baptist Church and the work is not from a research perspective. Daniel Evans and Joseph Godwin, *Elder Governance: Insights into Making the Transition* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2011).

- a. Constitution Committee (5 individuals)
 - b. Sampling of the Congregation (9 individuals)
 - c. Appointed Elders (4 individuals in a focus group)
3. Observation: the direct account of the researcher
 4. Document Review: analysis of historical and transitional documents

The study progressed through the stages of the transition using each of these research methods:

Table 6. Research overview

Transition Process	RQ's	Research Methods (Documents)
1. History	2,3,5	1,2a, 2b, 2c, 3, 4 (Original Constitution, Pastoral History)
2. Plan/Structure	1,2,3,4,5	2a, 3, 4 (New Constitution, Notes & Materials from Planning)
3. Announcement	1,2,3,4	1, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3, 4 (Sermon and Lesson text, Announcements, FAQ's)
4. Approval	2,4,5	1, 2b, 3, 4 (Meeting Minutes, Vote Result)
5. Selection	1,4,5	1, 2b, 2c, 3, 4 (Nomination Forms, Announcements)
6. Results	1,5	1, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3, 4 (Elder Training Materials, Church Records)

Surveying, interviewing, observing, and reviewing documentation throughout the stages of the transition process, built on the foundation of the precedent literature, answered the research questions regarding how this church made the transition to a plurality of elders and what that has meant in the life of the congregation. Chapter 4 walks through the stages of the transition while chapter 5 reports the analysis and answers to the research questions.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

This case study research was planned and organized to present an accurate description of this church's transition to a plurality of elders in such a way that the same case study could be repeated by others and yield similar results. The study was performed with a methodological protocol built on a foundation of the precedent literature. Every attempt was made to eliminate bias, maintain a clear chain of evidence, and protect validity while remaining accessible and practical for other churches that would want to learn from the lessons of First Baptist Church of Waverly in this transition. Multiple primary sources comprised of surveys, interviews, document review, and observation were used. A robust database of information and analysis from the study is available in the appendices, providing anyone with enough information to draw their own conclusions regarding this transition to elder leadership.

Compilation Protocol

The case study began with a survey in which the entire membership of First Baptist Waverly was invited to participate so long as they had been a member prior to the transition to elder leadership. I designed the survey, it was validated by another pastor who had been through a similar transition, and it was field tested with three members. Several changes were made as a result of this validation process. The survey was made available on-line via Google forms, e-mailed to members as a pdf, and paper copies were available in the church office and worship center. A total of 75 responses were received. 36 were submitted on-line and 39 were submitted on paper. I entered those submitted on paper via the online platform. The answers were tabulated in a spreadsheet and open-ended

questions were coded using both predetermined and emerging codes. The survey is available in appendix 2 and the compilation of the answers is in appendix 3. Basic descriptive statistics were calculated on some questions to provide a better picture of the nature of the transition. Some categories were analyzed against factors such as age, length of time at the church, and level of involvement, with a chi-squared test looking for statistical significance. The chi-squared test seeks to identify whether the perceived findings are genuine or the result of sampling error.¹ The factors found to be significant are indicated in appendix 3. Overall, however, the survey was used primarily for qualitative purposes, not necessarily quantitative. The congregational survey served as an introductory type of interview to provide an overall picture of the congregation's perspective and give guidance to the interview protocol and document review.²

From the analysis of the survey, three different interview protocols were written—one for a focus group with the new elders, one for individual interviews with members of the constitution committee, and one for individual interviews with select members. The focus group of elders was attended by all current elders and lasted almost an hour.³ This elder focus group reviewed the transition as a whole but focused on their personal views more than trying to assess the congregational feelings.⁴ The second set of interviews was with the constitution committee that planned and designed the proposal to move to this new government of elder leadership. They were interviewed individually,

¹ Louis M. Rea and Richard A. Parker, *Designing and Conducting Survey Research: A Comprehensive Guide*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 184.

² Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 108.

³ First Baptist started two years ago with six elders: four lay elders and two staff elders, including me, the pastor/researcher. One lay elder has since moved away for health reasons. I facilitated the focus group, and so four elders participated in the discussion.

⁴ The interview protocol and the transcript of the discussion are available in appendix 9 and 10 respectively.

and all five members of the committee participated. The interviews lasted 10-15 minutes each and focused on the planning stage of the transition and a review of the structure that they put into place.⁵ Additionally, nine select members of the congregation were interviewed more in depth regarding their perspectives on the transition. An effort was made to choose a representative sample of the congregation.⁶ The interviews lasted 15-20 minutes each and were focused on more thoroughly developing the congregational perspectives discovered in the survey.⁷

Documents were also reviewed to better understand the context of this transition. Yin writes, “For case studies, the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources.”⁸ In this study, documents do not answer qualitative questions about the transition, but those same documents provide evidence backing up what was said in the survey and in interviews. Therefore, documents were reviewed to further validate what members of the congregation had said. I examined historical accounts, meeting minutes, meeting agendas, sermons, lessons, announcements, and correspondence.⁹

Finally, direct observation was employed throughout this case study research, specifically, what Yin calls participant-observation since I was a guiding participant

⁵ See their interview protocol in appendix 7 and transcripts of each interview in appendix 8.

⁶ See selection profiles in appendix 4. This was not a perfect representative sample because those who volunteered to participate further were also those who are generally more involved in church government. Therefore, it is acknowledged that those who are relatively superficial in their church involvement were not represented more in this interview process. It was felt that those with less involvement were able to thoroughly express their limited opinions on the survey.

⁷ The congregational interview protocol is located in appendix 5, and the transcripts from the individual interviews are found in appendix 6.

⁸ Yin, *Case Study Research*, 103.

⁹ Assistance in this process, especially finding and interpreting meeting minutes and other historical notes, was provided by two church administrative assistants under my direct supervision. Select documents most relevant to this study are included throughout the appendices.

during the transition process.¹⁰ Observation was made throughout the research that will be conveyed in the research findings. Looking back, there was no research journal from the period, but personal notes and correspondence proved to be invaluable in reviewing events from the transition. Additionally, since the transition occurred two years ago, I was able to retrospectively assess the transition and its outcomes with some critical distance. Yin lists multiple benefits and problems with this type of arrangement.¹¹ In this case, the increased access and insight seemed to outweigh the potential bias.

Transition Overview

The case study methods examined all aspects of the church's process of change. First Baptist's transition to plurality of elders can be broken up into six distinct stages, as outlined in chapter 3: History, Planning, Announcement, Approval, Selection, Results. These stages were used as a framework to study the steps the church took to make this transition in its church government. A deeper look into this change for First Baptist begins with a historical overview of the church to put the transition into a proper context. An explanation of the church's proposed plan and structure follows that history. This stage highlights many of the decisions made before announcing the change in church polity to the congregation. The third stage will examine how the proposed change was announced to the church, which leads naturally to how the church responded and the approval of the transition. After the approval of the change in government, the elders were selected. The final stage looks at what has happened since the change was made and how the church is different.

¹⁰ Yin, *Case Study Research*, 113.

¹¹ Yin lists access, insight, and control as the most significant benefits of participant observation. The primary potential problems include issues related to bias: the inability to work as an external observer and a natural desire to support the group being studied. Yin, *Case Study Research*, 112-13.

History

Waverly is a small town located in an area that transitions from rural Appalachia into the more metropolitan central Ohio. While Waverly could claim a little bit of both worlds, it more closely matches greater Appalachia socially and economically. The story of First Baptist begins with mid-twentieth century economic development in the area. In the early 1950s, a uranium enrichment plant was constructed in Piketon, Ohio, near Waverly. This new plant brought jobs, which brought numerous people to the area. Many of the families that moved to the area were from the South. Relocated Southern Baptists desiring to worship with other like-minded believers found no new church home in the surrounding area. So, several families that had migrated from Southern Baptist churches began to meet at a local Presbyterian church, and very quickly a Southern Baptist church began to form. The young church bought their own property and officially constituted in 1954, with 65 members. The church grew rapidly and required more space in which to worship and became one of the larger churches in the area averaging 200 people in attendance over the last number of decades.

In many ways, the church grew into a typical Southern Baptist church, loyal to many of the programs and patterns of other churches in the denomination. Missions were always a focus, both locally and globally. Giving to the cooperative program was a priority (and remains strong to this day).¹² Home visitation was seen as a necessity for church growth. Along with traditional Sunday School and adult programs like Baptist Men and Women on Mission, Children's programs such as Mission Friends, Royal Ambassadors, and Girls in Action taught kids about the Bible, Jesus Christ, and how to live out their faith. The church was led by a pastor, usually called from outside of the area, who was assisted by a team of men from the church who had been ordained as deacons. The early

¹² The Cooperative Program includes contributions by Southern Baptist churches to their state conventions and the national convention that share in the costs of various ministries and missions. More information on the Cooperative Program can be found at Southern Baptist Convention, "The Cooperative Program," accessed September 16, 2019, <http://www.sbc.net/cp/>.

decades of the church saw ups and downs in attendance and effectiveness. The emphasis and attitude of the church seemed to consistently reflect the pastor that was in leadership. If the pastor was particularly evangelistic, then so was the church. If the pastor focused more on spiritual growth and Bible study, then the church focused on that as well. This caused the identity of the church to shift slightly with each subsequent pastor.

In the late 1980s, the church called a younger, seminary-trained pastor from Kentucky who agreed to move his family to the area. On moving day, however, extensive health problems incapacitated the church's new leader. He was in a coma for weeks and in recovery for months. This brought a crisis of sorts to the church that desperately awaited a new leader for their congregation. Though disappointed, the church believed that this occurrence had not surprised God and decided to continue to support the family of this pastor, maintaining the agreed upon salary and benefits for the years to come. As a result of his continued physical struggles, the church decided to call its first associate pastor in 1990, a bi-vocational ordained minister that had been a part of the church for years. In 1991, the two began serving as "co-pastors," an arrangement that recognized the men with equal authority and responsibility in the church, still being assisted by a group of deacons.

The situation worked well at first, but deepening health problems led the pastor from Kentucky to step away from the ministry at First Baptist, while remaining a part of the church. The church went back to the single-pastor model for a few years until it was recognized that at a church of its size, even a full-time pastor needs help. In 1997, an associate pastor was again called from within the church. Several associate pastors have been hired since then. Some worked out better than others, but the role became an expected one in the life of the church. A review of church documents from the previous decades reveals a consistent pattern of the pastor, associate pastor, and deacons frequently leading the church in new endeavors and decisions. While the church remained fully

congregational in its government, voting on nearly everything, the people leaned heavily on these roles for leadership in the church.

Several significant details arise in a study of First Baptist's history as it pertains to the recent transition to elder leadership. Obvious challenges are seen in a pattern of leadership that is steeped in Southern Baptist tradition. Like so many other churches identified in the precedent literature, First Baptist could be described as a single-elder congregational model with all the same benefits and challenges that the polity brings. Since they only had one individual considered an elder, the church was highly influenced by the man who was in the role of pastor. Some pastors brought more aggressive authority and pushed the congregation to pass their own ideas and plans while other pastors were more passive and allowed fully democratic business meetings and the desires of the congregation to lead the church. Even though it was somewhat inconsistent over the years, the church grew accustomed to this type of congregational leadership.

Reflecting on this type of church government, many older members enjoyed participation in even the relatively mundane details of church administration. They felt like they were a part of the leadership of the church. "One person, one vote," remembers a long-time dedicated member of FBC.¹³ This traditional view would certainly create a challenge to overcome if the church were to transition to elder leadership that would take many of these decisions out of the hands of the congregation. This fully democratic form of government also pushed some, mostly younger, members to see the need for change. Several pointed out that business meetings had become ineffective and committee leadership simply was not working.¹⁴ They cite avoiding business meetings because of the lengthy discussion of trivial matters and the occasional bickering of members over these matters. They recognized that more vocal individuals seemed to end up with greater

¹³ See appendix 6, interview with Ernie.

¹⁴ See Appendix 6, interview with Missy.

authority in this system. For these younger members, a different type of government was a welcome thought. One younger respondent to the survey wrote, “The fact that certain individuals have had control over areas for a long time made the transition easier in the sense that people could see that this change was necessary.”¹⁵

The single-elder congregational model that the church had operated under for so many years was seen as valuable and important by the older generation while simultaneously outdated by the younger members of the church. This model of church government served as both an obstacle to change for some and a reason for it to others.

Another aspect of FBC’s history that would affect this transition to elders was the church’s role of deacons. This system also changed with the pastor, but the men who had been ordained as deacons were consistently seen as leaders in the church.¹⁶ Many times the deacons were seen as those in authority. According to those who formerly served in this system, they were supposed to advise and assist the pastor, but were frequently presented as a group that helped make decisions in the church.¹⁷ Many in the congregation now acknowledge that deacons essentially functioned, at least in part, as elders.¹⁸ One respondent said, “I think the deacons were many times looked up to as what we now know are elders.”¹⁹ A review of the previous constitution, revised in 2010, less than a decade before this transition, reveals this confusion between the role of elders and deacons. Though the duties of the deacon described in this previous version of the constitution are very general, the qualifications included, “Inasmuch as one of the

¹⁵ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q16.

¹⁶ See appendix 6, interview with Betty.

¹⁷ See appendix 10, Elder Focus Group.

¹⁸ See appendix 8, interview with Teresa. The current elders admitted that previously, the deacons were a kind of dual role. See appendix 10, Elder Focus Group. Mike had also recognized this dual role in another SBC church that he had attended. See appendix 6, Interview with Mike.

¹⁹ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q16.

requirements of a deacon is that he shall be “apt to teach”, the deacon should participate in the full teaching and training of the church.”²⁰ In reality, the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3, as previously demonstrated in the review of biblical passages, lists this requirement of elders and is then conspicuously absent in the qualifications for deacons. The previous constitution also references many circumstances that the deacons were to make decisions alongside the pastor.²¹ This constitutional text confirms confusion at First Baptist on the biblical roles of elders and deacons. This confusion was mentioned by survey respondents as the chief reason for concern in the transition. One third of those responding said they did not understand the difference between deacons and elders, and therefore did not see a need for change. Much like the previous polity, however, this confusion of the biblical role of deacons could be seen as a need for change and in a way, a stepping stone to the transition. The establishment of a small group of men who were seen to have authority in the church, misunderstood as it may be, could have laid the foundation for this transition. One member wrote, “I think in general the church trusted the deacons and the pastors and even if they didn’t fully understand or see the need they trusted they wouldn’t be led astray.”²² Another member responded, “The fact that we were a relatively small congregation with trusted men already in leadership positions made the transition easy.”²³

The church had confused the roles of elders and deacons, but it was already the norm to see that there needed to be a small group of men helping to make decisions in the church. These men, for the most part, were already trusted and respected and even though

²⁰ See appendix 11, Previous FBC Constitution and By-laws (2010), By-laws Article I, Section III.

²¹ See appendix 11, Previous FBC Constitution and By-laws (2010). See Associate Pastor calling and dismissal for example, By-laws Article I, Section II.

²² See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q16.

²³ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q16.

not all were ultimately selected to become elders, the role's existence seems to have made the transition to elder leadership easier for some members.

Another role that shaped this transition was that of associate pastor. Though not officially listed in the previous constitution, the role became expected over the years.²⁴ A question posed to congregants on the survey asked if the presence of associate pastors played a role in the transition to elder leadership. Only one third said it helped them favor the transition, far less than other factors. However, one cannot deny the influence that a development of the role of associate pastor and even, for a brief period, "co-pastors" must have had on the congregation's view of church polity. After twenty to thirty years of the presence of associate pastors on staff, the church was presented with the idea to officially have more than one leader in the church. Though the church remained in a single-elder congregational model, one could argue that the regular presence of an associate pastor had already moved them to see the possibility of more than one elder. At least some members have admitted that the role of associate pastor did indeed affect their view of moving to elder leadership.²⁵

In 2015, the church called me as pastor and I expressed a desire to eventually change to a different model of church government.²⁶ Two years later, after an up and down history of effectiveness and success of church leadership, First Baptist Waverly was presented with the idea of moving from a single-elder congregational model to elder

²⁴ In the Previous FBC Constitution (2010), associate pastors fell under the role section of "Ministerial Staff." See appendix 11, By-laws, Article I, Section II.

²⁵ Thirty one percent checked this as a factor. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q8.

²⁶ I was called as pastor in September of 2015. I grew up in this church but had been away for approximately twenty years serving in other churches. I had already been studying church leadership for a number of years and had come to the conviction that a plurality of elders was a more biblical and practical form of church government. I made this clear in my interview and questioning and expressed my desire to make this change at the appropriate time. Review of documents from the time revealed that the idea was first presented to the church about two months after my hire, but we waited for over another year before beginning to move on the proposition.

leadership. In early 2017, the existing constitution committee was re-affirmed, and the committee began meeting to overhaul the existing constitution, including the model of church polity.

Planning

The constitution committee began meeting in February of 2017, with the charge of completely rewriting the church's constitution and by-laws. Several topics were addressed and ultimately changed, but the main focus was transitioning the church's polity from single-elder congregationalism to some form of plural-elder congregationalism. The committee consisted of five members plus myself and the associate pastor sat in on the meetings as ex officio members of the committee. Of the five members on the committee, one had served previously on this committee when the last revision occurred in 2010, three had been elected before this proposal, and one was added when another member stepped down just before the 2017 revision began. The three women and two men had all been confirmed by the church at a business meeting in February 2017, and were trusted members of the congregation. They matched the relative demographics of the congregation as a whole.

To begin the series of meetings, the committee was given a critique of the previous constitution highlighting areas where change was desired. The concept of elder leadership in a Baptist church was new to all but one of them, so before considering any parts of the structure, the committee was given study materials. The material included select chapters from Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* to provide an overview of church polity, along with chapters from Dever, Merkle, and Hammet to help define the proposal of elders in a Baptist church.²⁷ The committee members also pursued their own

²⁷ The committee was given chaps. 44-47 from Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 853-949; the entirety of Mark E. Dever, *A Display of God's Glory: Basics of Church Structure* (Washington, DC: Center for Church Reform, 2001); chaps. 14-20 from Benjamin L. Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 109-57; and chap. 8, "The Office of Deacon" from John S. Hammet, *Biblical*

biblical investigation. They saw their collective role as representatives of the congregation that were charged with thoroughly examining this idea to make certain it was biblical and beneficial to the church.²⁸ Each of them credits this time of personal study with giving them the understanding necessary to move forward with the idea. When the time came to decide in the following month, the committee was unanimous that elder leadership was a biblical concept and a beneficial idea for the congregation. All that remained was the daunting task of determining the details of how this new government would function. Over the coming months, the committee studied the different possibilities of a church government that included plural elder leadership and began to discuss the overall structure, including responsibilities, qualifications, and appointment. The following is an overview of the structure they designed and the reasoning for the decisions made.²⁹

Given the church's comfort with having someone called *the* pastor, the constitution committee decided on an approach that included a point-person or first among equals. All elders would have equal authority, but the church would retain a full-time staff member referred to as Lead Pastor.³⁰ This pastor would have the same overall duties as the other elders with additional responsibilities that included organizing the group of elders, being the primary teacher/preacher on Sunday mornings, and overseeing the

Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 191-213. Each member of the committee found these resources helpful in preparing for their role.

²⁸ See appendix 8, Constitution Committee Interviews.

²⁹ This progression follows the one found in chap. 2 of this dissertation found under the heading "Understanding Plural Elder Congregationalism."

³⁰ It may seem like a conflict of interest for the pastor to sit with a committee that decided whether his role would remain in the new church government, but all options were on the table. Had the committee decided not to have a first among equals, we were prepared to take time making the transition to bi-vocational ministry. As we grow in this type of government, this is an option that we still discuss occasionally.

ministerial and support staff in day-to-day operations.³¹ This aspect of the structure was not debated much among the committee. It was the general consensus that it would be too radical of a change for the church to move away from having a position called the “pastor.” The constitution committee stands by this decision even two years later. Each believes that a point person was within the biblical framework and was necessary, both practically and for the acceptance of a new model.³² The congregation seems to agree. Most of those interviewed stated that having a designated leader, a face to the organization, even if he did not have any more authority than the other elders, was important to them.³³ Unfortunately, it is hard to overlook that this model does somewhat confuse the issue of equal authority. Because of the increased visibility of one elder, many see this structure as similar to before only with elders instead of deacons. There was some doubt among these new elders that the congregation really saw anything different.³⁴ Some members agreed that the other elders needed more visibility while others members believed they are visible enough. However, when asked to name the elders of FBC on the survey, many members could not do so. Out of those who successfully named the lay elders (only about half of the respondents), only one third included the pastor in their list.³⁵ This seems to reveal a distinction among the group that was not intended by the constitution committee. While they originally planned for an increased responsibility of the point person, they did not want it to be seen as a distinct role. The team intended to have what chapter 2 deemed a “first among equals” structure (ooo*oo) and the constitution reads accordingly.

³¹ See appendix 12, New FBC Constitution and By-laws (2017), Article II, Section I, for full text of requirements.

³² See appendix 8, Constitution Committee Interviews.

³³ See appendix 6, Member Interviews. Mike thought it was a bit of a compromise. Jessica and Matt were a bit neutral on the matter. The rest of those interviewed were adamant regarding the necessity of an individual designated as the lead pastor.

³⁴ See appendix 10, Elder Focus Group.

³⁵ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q15.

However, in practice, it sometimes seems to function as a “separate board” elder structure (o | oooo).

Another significant question the committee faced in planning the structure was the authority of the congregation. After much study, the committee decided to retain the overall congregational authority and thus deemed the structure “elder-leadership” in contrast to the possibility of “elder-rule.” This is not to say, however, that the congregation’s role remained unchanged. The new constitution removed the idea of a full democracy and instead gave the elders authority to make decisions on day-to-day matters and only required a congregational vote on certain larger decisions (elder and ministerial staff approval and dismissal, constitution and by-law changes, annual budget, real estate transactions, and unbudgeted expenditures over \$10,000).³⁶ This structure allowed the congregation to retain ultimate authority but delegate authority for decisions to this group of elders. The committee again saw this within the biblical framework of elder leadership and believed it was best for the congregation. Most members applaud this change for the sake of efficiency and effectiveness and still believe that they have a voice in matters, but some older members who had grown accustomed to working within a full congregational model miss the authority over day-to-day decisions that they once had. Others do not feel as they have lost authority, but instead lost awareness of the administrative decisions that have been made.³⁷

The committee also had to outline the responsibilities of these elders. What would be expected of this group of men? Was it merely an administrative role or were they to have ministerial functions as well? After studying the role in the New Testament church, the committee saw a balance among ministry and administration. Elders were

³⁶ See appendix 12, New FBC Constitution and By-laws (2017), By-Laws, Article III, Section IV.

³⁷ Examples of these views may be seen in both the survey results in appendix 3 and the member interviews in appendix 6.

called to be spiritual leaders as much as they were business leaders. Therefore, the committee approved a list of duties that fell into three primary areas: teaching, shepherding, and leading.³⁸ While not all elders would be required to regularly teach, all of them should be willing and able. It is also their responsibility to oversee other teachers in the church and ensure sound doctrine is being taught. The elders would also minister to the congregation. They could not personally meet every personal need of the church but should make certain that needs were being met and be available to help when necessary. They would oversee the group of deacons to help in this shepherding task. Finally, the elders were given administrative authority to lead the church as they saw fit. Though they are to take larger matters before the church, they should also feel the freedom to move forward on ministry, financial, and personnel decisions. They are to oversee the ministry team leaders of the church to ensure that the programs are running smoothly and accomplishing the mission and vision of the church. This is a lot to ask of men that usually have a full-time job in the marketplace. As such, the new elders agreed that some anxiety over availability and ability has been a constant presence since making the change.³⁹ A few believe that more elders would help while others believe that more training is necessary.

The constitution committee had to determine qualifications for these men. They all agreed that this seemed to be an easier task since the scriptural qualifications are relatively clear. The committee chose to simply include the passages from 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 in the new by-laws. These were summed up with the following: spiritual maturity, proven leadership record in his family and the church, well thought of in the church and community, agreement with the Baptist Faith and Message (2000), and the ability to teach and articulate the church's beliefs. The committee chose not to create a hard and fast rule in the by-laws against those who had been divorced or a strict judgment

³⁸ See appendix 12, New FBC Constitution and By-laws (2017), By-Laws, Article II, Section I.

³⁹ See appendix 10, Elder Focus Group.

of a potential elder's children and instead decided to leave that up to the congregation on a case-by-case basis. There was some discussion of whether women should be permitted to be elders and some biblical debate back and forth ensued. It was then decided that allowing female elders would not be compatible with the Baptist Faith and Message (2000) and would therefore also require a change in denomination, which was beyond the charge of this committee.⁴⁰ No definite age limit was required to be an elder at First Baptist, but it was implied in the level of observed faithfulness over the years. When the congregation was asked in an open-ended manner in this research about what qualifications should be required of elders, their list was strikingly similar to that in Scripture.⁴¹ Some of course simply listed the scriptural passages, but those who listed their own prioritized spiritual maturity and a Godly lifestyle above all else. This was followed by the need for biblical knowledge and proven faithfulness in the church and their family. Overall, the character of the man being considered for elder seems to be more important to the church than the skills. By following the clear scriptural requirements, the constitution committee laid the groundwork for ensuring the right men were selected.

In the proposed structure, men would be recommended by the existing elders and then approved by the congregation, requiring an 80 percent affirmative vote. Any elder could be removed in much the same way and would require an 80 percent vote of confidence to remain in that role. The committee set no minimum number of elders for the congregation but did make the provision that the number of lay elders (those not in the employ of the church) should always outnumber the staff elders. This rule was

⁴⁰ The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message says, "Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by Scripture." The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message, "Article VI," accessed September 16, 2019, <http://www.sbc.net/bfm2000/bfm2000.asp>.

⁴¹ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q13.

included to assure the congregation that staff elders could not take control and abuse power without some oversight from those representing the congregation. At least one committee member (who was later named an elder) said that this particular provision was a deciding factor for him.⁴² The selection process is examined more closely later.

One final aspect of the structure to be settled proved to be one of the most controversial among the committee members. Now that we had elders, what would the role of deacons be? Though the role of deacons is not directly related to decisions regarding elders, it is one that naturally flows from those decisions within a church that has confused the role of deacons and elders since its inception. This question brought much discussion, probably more than any other topic.⁴³ It was ultimately decided that the most effective role description of deacons throughout the history of the church, that also fit into a biblical framework, was a deacon family ministry. Therefore, the deacons' role would be to help the elders shepherd the congregation and meet needs by ministering directly to the people of the church. Because deacons no longer had authority or a decision-making role, the idea was put forward to now include women in the role. There ~~seemed to be~~ some biblical support for such an idea.⁴⁴ The committee, though not completely in agreement, decided that the church was not completely ready for this new understanding of deacon. A compromise was reached that stated deacons would be

⁴² See appendix 10, Gary Cooper, Elder Focus Group,

⁴³ See appendix 8, Constitution Committee Interviews.

⁴⁴ The committee no longer saw deacons as an authority, so 1 Tim 2:12 was not an issue. The example of Phoebe in Rom 16:1 came up and there was disagreement on whether she was simply a servant or in an office of the church. The committee also wrestled with the fact that the 1 Tim 3 qualifications for elders made no mention of women, but the qualifications for deacons did. In the end, the committee decided that deacons should be husband and wife teams in this congregation. This is a balance similar to what Alexander Strauch has advocated. Regarding 1 Tim 3:11, he notes, "This is a highly debatable text. I understand these "women" to be wives who assist their deacon husbands. But even if they are women deacons, they hold an office of mercy ministries, not one of governance and teaching. Thus women deacons would not violate Paul's restriction against women teaching and leading men." Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*, rev. and exp ed. (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995), 300.

expected to serve alongside their wives. Both the committee and the congregation seemed to find this acceptable. The committee had a difficult time defining the role of the deacon in light of having elder leadership and that confusion lingers even two years later.⁴⁵ The constitution committee still believes that the introduction to the concept was clear but that so much time in another system has created lasting confusion that needed to be continually clarified.⁴⁶

Overall, the process of planning the structure was handled well by a group of men and women who were trusted by the congregation to layout a more biblical framework for a new model of church government for First Baptist. The committee is to be applauded for taking their role seriously and studying thoroughly to present the congregation with a structure that was both biblical and beneficial. Next was the time to announce the proposal to the congregation.

Announcement

The congregation, at least those who participated regularly in business meetings, knew that a proposed change to the constitution and by-laws was coming. They approved of the individuals in the constitution committee in February 2017 and expected a report back with a proposal within the coming months. The congregation at large also had to be informed regarding the proposal. The deacons and staff received a preview of the constitution and then the proposed change, especially the transition to elder leadership, was highlighted in an expository sermon series on the book of 1 Timothy in July 2017. The sermon on 1 Timothy 3:1-13 focused on the qualifications for church leadership, specifically the difference between elders and deacons, and then announced the proposed

⁴⁵ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers.

⁴⁶ See appendix 8, Constitution Committee Interviews.

change to elder leadership.⁴⁷ Those interested in learning more were invited to attend a study the following Wednesday evening on “The Biblical Background for Elder Leadership.” At that study, an overview of elder leadership from the Old Testament through the New Testament church into today demonstrated the historical roots of this idea.⁴⁸ Per the rules of the previous constitution and by-laws, a business meeting was set for August 13, 2017, to vote to approve these proposed changes. In the month following the announcement of the proposal, church members were given ample opportunity to discuss it and ask questions. Reminders were frequently given in the church bulletin and the announcements of the upcoming vote. Drafts of the new constitution and by-laws along with FAQ sheets regarding the transition were made available.⁴⁹ There was one more reminder in a sermon on 1 Timothy 5:22 one week before the vote. Those active in the life of the church knew about this change and were given opportunity to review the proposal.

When surveyed, the congregation was asked what helped them favor the change in the constitution and by-laws in general and specifically the transition to elder leadership. The most significant answer was a factor of trust, which will be discussed later. A couple other answers, however, revealed that the way the constitution committee handled this announcement was incredibly important. Respondents to the survey said that both the ability to ask questions and the time between the announcement and the vote were important factors in favoring the transition.⁵⁰ This led members of the congregation like Matt, one of the interviewees, to say that the transition seemed to go smoothly because

⁴⁷ See appendix 13, sermon notes from 1 Tim 3:1-13.

⁴⁸ See appendix 14, study notes from “Biblical Background for Elder Leadership.”

⁴⁹ See appendix 15, Constitution Change FAQ Sheet.

⁵⁰ Of the respondents, 74 percent said that the ability to discuss and ask questions was a factor, in addition to 60 percent of respondents appreciating the time they had between the announcement and the vote. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q8.

leadership was transparent and there did not seem to be a hidden agenda.⁵¹ The time taken and the willingness to discuss the proposal in an open forum communicated just as much about the proposal as the content did. In some ways, people were evaluating the way it was handled just as much as the proposal itself. Had the constitution committee been secretive and hurried, many members may have turned against the proposal simply out of suspicion. However, time and openness led the congregation to agree that this announcement was handled well.⁵²

Another important factor in this announcement was that the proposal seemed to come from Scripture. The idea of elder leadership was so thoroughly demonstrated from the Bible that many members were overwhelmed by a desire to follow the biblical example, even if they did not feel it was a mandate.⁵³ Many members listed this biblical demonstration as a reason they favored the transition.⁵⁴ Even some long time members and church leaders were surprised by the weight of evidence for this form of church polity.⁵⁵ Because the church had a strong foundation built on a solid view of Scripture, the proposal had to be shown from scripture. The announcement first came up in an expository sermon and was then followed with a thorough study and discussion of the biblical texts relating to the subject. Many members were then able to do their own personal study on the subject and come to the same conclusion. This seemed to be a strong factor in the favorability of the proposal.

⁵¹ See appendix 6, interview with Matt.

⁵² See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q6, the consensus was that no change was necessary.

⁵³ Several members that were interviewed did not believe that the transition to elder leadership was necessary, but all of them acknowledged that it was much closer to the polity seen in Scripture.

⁵⁴ Of the respondents, 71 percent checked, “It was demonstrated and explained from the Bible” to the question, “Which of the following things do you think helped you favor the constitution change and specifically the transition to elders?” See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q8.

⁵⁵ See appendix 6, interviews with Ernie, Missy, and Jessica.

Approval

The new constitution and by-laws that included a change to elder leadership went before the church as a motion from the constitution committee on the evening of August 13, 2017. Because of the groundwork that had already been done during the announcement, there were virtually no questions that evening regarding the motion. Votes were cast by ballot and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting then moved to a focus on selecting the men who would serve as elders.

Selection

According to the new constitution and by-laws, potential elders were to be nominated by the existing elders. Since there was no existing group to recommend the initial elders, a special plan was created by the constitution committee and became part of the motion for a new constitution. The initial elders would be nominated by the congregation, then examined and officially recommended by the pastor and a team consisting of existing deacons who had not been nominated or declined to serve and constitution committee members who had become familiar with the qualifications. This plan was proposed as a one-time occurrence for these initial elders. When surveyed for this research, 97 percent of respondents said that they were pleased with this nomination process.

Nomination forms were handed out that evening and the congregation was encouraged to pray about nominating men for this role. Fifty-three nomination forms were returned in total. The nominations from the congregation included 24 different men. The top nominations were considered one by one for the qualities set forth by the new constitution and by-laws (which ultimately came from Scripture). Several men turned down their nomination for various reasons: did not feel qualified, too old and set in ways, did not completely understand the role, etc.⁵⁶ In the end, nominations included the

⁵⁶ At one point while a couple of men were considering the nomination, it looked like it was possible that we actually would not have enough. There was much encouragement to men that did not think

existing associate pastor and four other lay elders (one of which had been pastor at this church previously). They were recommended on the evening of September 10, 2017, and once again, passed unanimously.

According to the recent congregational survey, almost two years after this selection took place, 97 percent of the respondents believe that the right men were selected through this process.⁵⁷ In interviews, this seemed to be yet another important part of the process. Had the wrong men been selected, it would have been known by now and this transition would have been considered a failure. When asked what he would want to tell other churches, Mike, who had previously been in other churches with elder leadership, warned, “I’d pick your elders wisely with much prayer and solicit the wisdom of the church, especially those who are walking closer in the Lord. You’re careful of traps, political traps, of favorites and things like that. I’ve seen it all and I’ve seen it be extremely damaging to the church body if the wrong people are selected as elders.”⁵⁸ The selection process turned out well for First Baptist. The men who received the highest number of nominations were godly men with exemplary lifestyles and decades of church service. Had that not been the case, this process could have been far more challenging and controversial. The selection of elders could be a step that is just as challenging as the announcement and approval for some congregations.

Results

What has changed at First Baptist as a result of this transition to a new model of church government? Amazingly, most respondents to the congregational survey

they were worthy and some deeper explanation of the role to both men and their wives. This step was not really considered beforehand in this transition. We would have never imagined that we might have to talk some men into becoming elders in their church. We were careful, however, not to coerce because we believed, according to 1 Tim 3, that it had to be something the men desired.

⁵⁷ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q14.

⁵⁸ See appendix 6, interview with Mike.

replied that nothing had changed.⁵⁹ For the majority of the congregation that had long since stopped attending business meetings and being involved in church government, nothing had changed. For them, it was business as usual. They did not make their opinion known before and they do not currently, so nothing changed. A few acknowledged that behind the scenes, there were probably changes that had been made but that as an average member, they could not see anything different. For many of these members, that is probably why they can say this transition went smoothly. Nothing changed for them.

For the more active members, however, things did change. The members who regularly attended business meetings in the past and were involved in church government expressed their opinions in one of two camps. Some, almost exclusively older members, have not liked what this transition has done to congregationalism. They miss voting and discussing matters in an open forum. They say they used to feel a part of things, but now feel left out. Betty says, “I just feel like we’re kind of out of the loop. I think. I feel like the senior group is all out of the loop.”⁶⁰ However, other involved members applaud the efficiency this new polity has brought,⁶¹ which includes changing from business meetings to membership meetings. These members, frequently younger, did not care for the way business was handled and the lengthy discussion of what they believed to be trivial matters.⁶² When Jessica was asked if she missed anything about voting in business meetings, she laughed and responded, “Because they took forever. It’s just like such a small things, like we’d like to buy a lawn mower. It’s like, okay, do we really need to do

⁵⁹ Of the respondents to the open-ended question, “What would you say has changed the most since making the decision to be an elder-led church?” 43 percent said that there was no visible change from the way things used to operate. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q17.

⁶⁰ See appendix 6, interview with Betty. See also interview with Ernie.

⁶¹ Twenty-one percent list efficiency as the biggest change they have seen and 32 percent list it as the biggest advantage to this new government. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q17 and Q18.

⁶² See appendix 6, interview with Jenny.

voting? I don't know. It just seems very trivial.”⁶³ These younger members see a difference and they prefer this new polity.

The vast majority of responses to questions that dealt with changes, either in the survey or in interviews, pertained to business related matters. Unfortunately, few responses were spiritual in nature. Several respondents pointed to increased accountability for the pastor and leadership in general. A few believed that involvement in the church had increased as a result. One couple pointed to the fact that there were now more people to go to when in need of prayer. Overwhelming, though, the changes and benefits seen were in the efficiency of making decisions. While this was a benefit that was expected, it was hoped that by this time the church would also acknowledge increased spiritual growth as a result of transitioning to elder leadership. Perhaps it is still too soon to evaluate the deeper results of this change in church polity.

This chapter has provided a narrative overview of the case study of First Baptist's transition to a plurality of elders. The study examined the events of the transition: the history of the church, the planning of the new constitution and by-laws, the announcement of the proposal, the vote to approve the recommendation, the selection of new elders, and some of the perceived results of the transition. Using a congregational survey, multiple interviews, observation, and document review, the research sought to discover the details of how this particular church made its transition. The next chapter returns to the research questions to discover what was learned and then generalizes the findings to other churches desiring to make the transition.

⁶³ See appendix 6, interview with Jessica.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This case study research was designed to describe a church's transition to plurality of elders in such a way that would be beneficial to anyone wishing to research the phenomenon further and to other churches considering the same direction. The research was guided by five research questions. Each of those research questions will be answered based on the analysis of findings. In addition to the answers drawn directly from the primary sources of the case study research, a rival explanation may be presented when appropriate. Some of these rivals were anticipated during the planning stage while others developed during the research process. The inclusion of these rivals is an important component of a good case study.¹ Some of them will be dismissed based on the research while others may lay the groundwork for further research. At the end of this chapter, final conclusions will be drawn regarding this church's transition along with generalizations for other churches and opportunities for further research.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked, how did this particular church plan, design, and communicate its transition to plurality of elders? The results of this question are included in this section.

¹ Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 34, 133. The rival explanations are listed under each of the research questions after the primary observations. There may be strong evidence in support of some these rivals and they are used to strengthen the understanding of the case, not necessarily weaken the primary conclusions. Even the stronger rival explanations would need further study to verify and are presented simply as potential alternatives to the primary observations. The primary observations remain the most likely conclusions from this case study.

Take an appropriate amount of time. First Baptist was careful to plan out its entire transition to elder leadership. The change was slow, but purposeful. As can be seen in the timeline for the transition in appendix 1, from the first public mention of the idea until the vote to approve the new constitution and by-laws was just over 20 months. That is not a fast transition. During these months, much work went into gaining understanding and acceptance from key stakeholders. A constitution committee was formed to study the proposal that had been made by the pastor. The committee met for months to make certain this was a direction in which the church wanted to go. No idea was ever forcefully pushed, and no one was ever coerced. One member wrote on his survey, “I think [the pastor] did a good job of easing the congregation into it. First of all making people aware of the possibility for change. Then discussing the importance for the change along with the need. Then allowing feedback and time for people to digest it before bringing it to a vote.”² Members in both the survey and the interviews cited this slower pace as a positive when it came to favoring the transition.³ This time allowed everyone, from the staff to the constitution committee to the congregation as a whole, to come to an understanding of what was being presented and formulate their own opinion. Had this been a rushed proposal that seemed to be forced upon the congregation, the church probably would have experienced tension and if not allowed to slow down and process their opinions regarding it, would have rejected it outright. Instead, the time given to this change allowed everyone involved to hear, study, and decide on their own, which in the end was incredibly beneficial.

Plan of an acceptable structure. There were many choices on how to design a structure that included a plurality of elders. The precedent literature reviewed in chapter 2

² See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q6.

³ Sixty percent of respondents in the survey said the amount of time was a positive factor for them. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q8.

reveals several choices that needed to be made when designing a structure that includes a plurality of elders. Table 7 revisits this concept.⁴ Obviously, there would be more than one elder, but how those elders relate to one another changes from church to church. There are many possibilities, but they can be reduced to three basic structures:

Table 7. First Baptist Waverly plural elder structure

	Separate Board o oooo	First among Equals ooo*oo	Uniform o-o-o-o-o
Description	Pastor is assisted, advised or overseen by group	A group of elders with a clear primary leader	A relatively indistinct group of elders
Authority	Different, or mostly with pastor	Shared	Shared, but unique
Responsibility	Mostly on Pastor	Shared, but unique	Shared, but unique
Visibility	Almost all on Pastor	Slightly more on primary	Shared, but unique

First Baptist’s constitution committee decided to go with a model that maintained the presence of a lead pastor as the first among equals. They felt that moving toward a more uniform structure would be too radical at this time but wanted to make certain to create the equal authority of the group of elders, even if there is not equal responsibility at this time. The constitution committee still believes that they made the right choice,⁵ and the congregation agrees. Seven out of the nine interviewees from the

⁴ This table is duplicated here from chap. 2 to illustrate that First Baptist could have chosen to have a pastor that was completely separate from the board of elders or could have created a more uniform structure where there would be no lead pastor, but instead chose to create a structure of plural elders that included a first among equals.

⁵ See appendix 8, Constitution Committee Interviews.

congregation said that maintaining the role of pastor was a necessity.⁶ Rick articulated it this way,

I think it's necessary. We have that in any type of organization, I think you need that one person who is going to be the face of your organization. No matter how much power they may or may not have. I think you need that, that one person that is going to be the model or the picture or the face. And in our case that would be in our organization as a church that would be the pastor. And I think that's necessary.⁷

These members believed that the church still needed to have a designated leader for visibility in the community and for the sake of practicality in church operations.

Overwhelmingly, the congregation seems more comfortable with a point person, just as the committee predicted.

Another choice the committee had to make was how the elders would relate to the congregation in terms of decision making. For decades, the church had been fully congregational, and they voted on almost all decisions. When it comes to including plural elders, the precedent literature revealed different interpretations of what it means for a church to be congregational. A church could still vote on everything and just consider the elders as advisors or at the other end of the spectrum, the elders could make every decision in the church, including who would be elders.⁸

Table 8. First Baptist Waverly elder-led congregational government

“Elder-led”		“Elder-ruled”	
Elders advise the church that then votes on almost all issues	Church votes on major issues only and leaves the rest to elders	Church votes only on approval of elders, then leaves the rest to them	Church never votes but retains autonomy, elders self-perpetuate
High Congregational Involvement	Some Congregational Involvement	Little Congregational Involvement	No Congregational Involvement

⁶ See appendix 6, Member Interviews.

⁷ See appendix 6, Interview with Rick.

⁸ Table 8 is duplicated from chap. 2 to illustrate that First Baptist had to choose between what has been commonly called elder-leadership and elder-rule. The committee believed that their choice allowed the church to remain overall congregationally governed.

The constitution committee chose for the congregation to still vote on major matters, defined in the by-laws, including who would be elders.⁹ They believed that this relationship was still congregational in nature and that it provided a good balance.¹⁰ The current elders agree that it is a good balance and probably would not have worked had the committee pursued elder rule. In the elder focus group, Gary mentioned,

I think the transition from being completely a congregationally controlled church, if you tried to go to an elder ruled church, that would not have worked. So where we are I think is a very balanced structure and I think it sets our congregation and in that transition, I didn't, I don't think we had much resistance to that because they felt the congregation felt like we still have a voice in the large issues, large decision making. I think that's a plus for the congregation.¹¹

While a few of the older members in the congregation that were especially active admit to missing the interaction and involvement in business meetings, most agree with the committee and believe that they still have a say in matters of the church.¹² Leaving an element of congregationalism in the structure seems to have been a good move by the committee.

It was wise of the committee to take small steps and not expect the church to allow its structure to change too radically. These realistic changes demonstrated positive results while not causing people to be fearful of drastic change. Had the committee wanted to do away with the role of lead pastor or move to a structure that was more like “elder-rule,” the church most likely would not have accepted the proposal.

⁹ See appendix 12, New FBC Constitution and By-laws (2017), By-Laws, Article III, Section IV for full list of major issues on which the congregation still votes.

¹⁰ Each of the committee members believed, even two years after the decision, that the proper balance had been found and had the impression that the congregation agreed. See appendix 8, Constitution Committee Interviews.

¹¹ See appendix 10, Elder Focus Group.

¹² See appendix 6, Member Interviews.

Use multiple means of communication. When it came time to announce the proposal to the congregation, the pastor and committee used several different means of communication. It was announced in a business meeting, in multiple sermons, in announcements, in personal meetings with those in leadership positions, in letters and e-mails, and with a FAQ sheet. The diversity of communication is demonstrated by the fact that people remember hearing the news in different ways.¹³ This ensured that almost everyone heard the proposal through an official channel rather than rumor and speculation among members.¹⁴ The consistent clear communication was vital to this transition being a success. The church found the announcement of this proposed change completely acceptable and would not have changed much about how the committee communicated.¹⁵

This particular church was intentional about the planning, design, and communication of its transition to plural elders and that seems to have contributed to the success of the transition. The church, led by a committee that was representative of the congregation, took its time through the process and was careful not to hurry things or force the proposal. The constitution committee planned what they believed would be an acceptable structure to the congregation and were careful not to make too radical of a change. When it came time to announce the proposal, they were clear and used multiple means of communicating the idea to the congregation. The rival explanations entertain the idea that the transition was not successful because of this careful planning, design, and communication, but offer alternative possibilities for the so-called success.

¹³ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q5.

¹⁴ Only 9 percent remember hearing the announcement from someone other than church leadership. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q5.

¹⁵ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answer, Q6.

Rival explanation 1 to research question 1: *This was not actually a change to elder leadership because there was too much compromise.* While it was wise that the committee took steps to understand and consider how the congregation would react, one might argue that their ultimate structure was compromised as a result. Instead of actually moving to the type of plurality of elders seen in Scripture, where elders have higher degrees of authority, they settled for a lesser version to get it passed by the congregation.

While it is true that the acceptability of the structure was considered, that does not necessarily mean that a compromise was involved. A first among equals and congregation that still votes on some matters are both biblically supported and promoted by some who advocate for a plural elder structure.¹⁶ In actuality, any Southern Baptist church considering a similar transition that is currently single-elder congregational should consider the make-up of their church that has been accustomed to voting for years. Attempting to take away control completely could be unwise. First Baptist's structure should not be seen as a compromise, but as a win-win that other churches should consider.

Rival explanation 2 to research question 1: *The structure may be "first among equals" on paper but actually functions as a "separate board," which is essentially a re-branded pastor-deacon structure from before the transition.* This objection may be raised by some that would see little to no change in the structure of First Baptist. Before the transition, the deacons helped the pastor make decisions and then those were taken to the congregation for approval. That is basically what happens now except that the people on the board are called elders instead of deacons. Therefore, this is

¹⁶ See chap. 2 "Understanding Plural Elder Congregationalism." Authors who advocate for this type of structure include Mark E. Dever, *By Whose Authority? Elders in Baptist Life* (Washington, DC: 9Marks, 2006), 32-36; Phil Newton, *Elders in the Life of the Church: Rediscovering the Model for Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 76-81; and Samuel E. Waldron, "Plural Elder Congregationalism," in *Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government*, ed. Steven B. Cowan (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 210-12.

why the congregation was in favor of the change rather than an actual change in structure. In the Elder Focus Group, Barry expressed this concern about a lack of actual change: “But I think my concern or the thing is that in some people's eyes, I don't know that it has, that much has changed because we still have the pastor and associate pastor. And I'm not saying that's bad. But I think in some people's minds it's just that it's the same old thing.”¹⁷ When examining the possible structures again in table 9, it would appear that the profile of a “separate board” does fit the information gathered from First Baptist.¹⁸

Table 9. First Baptist Waverly actual versus planned plural elder structure

	Separate Board o oooo	First among Equals ooo*oo	Uniform o-o-o-o-o
Description	Pastor is assisted, advised or overseen by group	A group of elders with a clear primary leader	A relatively indistinct group of elders
Authority	Different, or mostly with pastor	Shared	Shared, but unique
Responsibility	Mostly on Pastor	Shared, but unique	Shared, but unique
Visibility	Almost all on Pastor	Slightly more on primary	Shared, but unique

The argument that First Baptist is simply using a rebranded deacon board model would certainly have some valid points. The elders at First Baptist have frequently digressed into a model that is closer to a separate board than what was outlined in the constitution and by-laws. It is also true that the structure is reminiscent of the previous government when deacons advised the pastor and then altogether brought things before the congregation. This rival explanation was anticipated and therefore planned for in the

¹⁷ See appendix 10, Elder Focus Group.

¹⁸ Table 9 is once again duplicated from chap. 2 to demonstrate that while First Baptist planned a structure with a “first among equals,” in actuality it may better resemble a “separate board.”

congregational survey. That survey confirmed a few suspicions. First, the elders may not be as visible as they should be.¹⁹ Second, the congregation does not completely understand the difference between the former deacons and the current elders.²⁰ Third, not all of the church considers the pastor as one of the elders but instead sees that role as a separate position entirely.²¹ Fourth, many congregants say they have seen little change as a result of this transition.²² These insights point toward confirming this rival explanation. It is possible that much of the church favored this transition because it is remarkably close to what they had previously.

However, even if that mindset is true, there is still an advantage to this change. First Baptist now has a different structure that may not yet be what it is supposed to be on paper but is something they can strive to grow toward. The church is now aware of a model evidenced in Scripture that is different than what they previously had and is still in a better position as a result of the transition. Additionally, the church now uses biblical terms for their leadership instead of confusing the roles. While it may not yet be operating exactly like the model the committee set up, it is within the scope of an elder-led government. It may be closer than desired to the previous model that featured a misunderstanding of the deacon role, but at least they are being called elders now instead

¹⁹ This question of visibility is debated with mixed answers in the surveys and interviews, but the strongest evidence that the elders need more visibility is the fact that a large portion of the congregation could not name the current elders at First Baptist. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q15.

²⁰ Multiple pieces of evidence point to this fact. Thirty-three percent of survey respondents listed this confusion as their primary reason that concerned them about the change. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q9. Multiple people also listed the clarification of deacon roles as one of the things they would still like to see change. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q22. Similar comments are peppered throughout the survey answers. Additionally, several members interviewed admitted to still being confused about the difference between the two roles. See appendix 6, Member Interviews.

²¹ Shown by the repeatedly expressed necessity of a point person in the interviews. See appendix 10, Member Interviews. It is also demonstrated by the fact that much of the congregation failed to include the pastor in their list of elders. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q15.

²² Answers regarding little to no perceived change are throughout the survey. Specifically, 43 percent of respondents said they saw no change. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q17.

of deacons. Attention to the biblical terminology has also increased awareness of the biblical qualifications and helped to increase the chances that biblically qualified men are serving in the role.²³

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked, what factors, if any, influenced people in the church to favor such a transition? The results of this question are included in this section.

Trust. Surprisingly, the most important factor in the transition had nothing to do with an argument for or against elder leadership. More than any other factor, the people of the congregation simply trusted the leaders of the church to lead in the right direction. This can be most clearly seen in the responses to the question “Which of the following things do you think helped you favor the constitution change and specifically the transition to elders?” on the congregational survey.²⁴ Three of the choices expressed trust in one group or another: the pastor, the constitution committee, or someone else they knew.

Table 10. Congregational survey—trust-related answers

76%	trusted the pastor to lead us in the right direction
43%	trusted the constitution committee to guide the change
42%	trusted other people that were in favor of the transition
85%	total respondents that listed some element of trust

²³ The congregation almost unanimously believes that the right men were selected in the process. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q14. Additionally, the congregation’s view of the qualifications to be an elder very closely matched the biblical requirements. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q13. These answers can be attributed, at least in part, to an increased awareness of the biblical qualifications due to the change in terminology.

²⁴ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q8.

In this congregational survey, 85 percent of respondents said that trusting the pastor, the constitution committee, or someone else in favor of the proposal was a reason that they favored the transition. Although the precedent literature regarding organizational change does make a case for the importance of any major transition being recommended or approved by a diverse group (which was done in this case), it does not seem to adequately communicate the relative importance of this trust. It was far and away the most important element during First Baptist's transition to elder leadership.

Those interviewed were asked about this necessity of trust. Their answers backed up the original survey. Most believed that without this trust First Baptist could not have completed this transition and would have been unwise to attempt it. When asked what builds the necessary level of trust, they responded with a variety of different answers. Some said it was actions that built trust, including the way the transition was announced with plenty of time and openness.²⁵ This demonstrated that the leaders had nothing to hide and therefore, built trust. Matt said, "It wasn't like there was a hidden agenda."²⁶ Others said that the trust they felt was built over time. According to them, a leader can earn trust through continued faithfulness to the church. The individuals leading the change at First Baptist had shown themselves faithful for years.²⁷ People believed that they had the best interest of the church in mind. Another ingredient for trust was personal relationship.²⁸ The change leaders in this case were known by most of the people of the church, which allowed everyone to feel that they had a representative who was looking out for them.

²⁵ The elders pointed out that there was trust in people and trust in the process. See appendix 10, Elder Focus Group.

²⁶ See appendix 6, Interview with Matt.

²⁷ The elders pointed to this repeatedly in their focus group. "Longevity" they decided to call it. See appendix 10, Elder Focus Group.

²⁸ Jessica points this out in her interview and credits this idea of relationship with building trust. See appendix 6. Interview with Jessica.

Trust was the most important factor that influenced people toward favoring this transition to elder leadership. The people of the church simply trusted those who were leading the change. The trust was built on consistent actions over time within the context of a personal relationship. The people of the church knew the change leaders and had previously seen them consistently do the right thing. When these leaders said they were in favor of making the transition to elder leadership, people felt at ease to agree.

Demonstrated from the Bible. The next most important factor in the transition, according to the initial survey, was the fact that the concept of elder leadership was clearly demonstrated from the Bible.²⁹ Of respondents, 71 percent agreed that this was a factor for them in favoring the transition. The church, like many Southern Baptist churches, has a rich history of seeing the Bible as the sole authority for the church. Since the scriptural presentation of this proposal was thorough and clear, it was as if the proposal was actually coming from the Bible instead of from people. Several of those interviewed from the congregation were surprised by the amount of biblical support presented. They had no previous interaction with this type of polity and wondered how they had missed it before this proposal.³⁰ Others interviewed admitted that they had seen the concept in Scripture but believe that the church had gone along with tradition believing that it was not that big of an issue.

First Baptist first announced the proposed transition to elder leadership to the whole congregation during an expository sermon on 1 Timothy 3.³¹ The topic of elders

²⁹ Technically, the second most checked factor that influenced people to favor the transition was the fact that there was a chance to ask questions. That has already been addressed above both in research question 1 and in the previous factor of trust.

³⁰ Ernie's response was the most striking in this case because even with his history with the church and his spiritual maturity and extensive biblical knowledge, he said he was surprised with the amount of biblical support for eldership leadership. See appendix 6, Interview with Ernie.

³¹ Message notes from this sermon can be seen in appendix 13. This backs up the suggestion by Newton and Merkle to introduce the idea during a sermon. See n252 in chap. 2.

and deacons came up naturally while preaching through the book and the congregation was given a chance to see the qualifications in context and hear the difference between these two biblical offices. This sermon was followed by a Wednesday evening study on the “Biblical Background for Elder Leadership.”³² These two events, along with the constitution committee’s use of Scripture and the encouragement to personally study, showed the congregation that this was a solid biblical concept that did not match the way the church currently operated. This created a desire in the members of the church to change to match scripture.

In addition to how the transition was handled by the constitution committee, members of First Baptist say that two other primary factors influenced them toward favoring the transition to elder leadership. The most important factor was trust in the leadership. A transition to elder leadership seems like primarily a doctrinal matter, but relationships are also vital. Additionally, the congregation said that the biblical nature of the change helped influence them toward favoring the transition. The following rival explanations offer alternative possibilities to what may have influenced the congregation to favor the transition to elder leadership.

Rival explanation 1 to research question 2: *The church already had plural elder leadership because it had the role of associate pastor for decades.* It was theorized based on the church’s history that the addition of the associate pastor role in the 1990s influenced the church to favor elder leadership. When asked about this possibility in the elder focus group, Barry responded, “I’ve never considered it. I never considered that. But actually thinking back on it now, maybe it did cause some.” Gary added, “I think it did. It probably aided the transition.”³³ Though this idea seems like a possibility theoretically, and it is still likely that the recent historical presence of multiple pastors did influence the

³² Notes from this study are available in appendix 14.

³³ See appendix 10, Elder Focus Group.

transition somewhat favorably, it was not shown to be a significant factor according to the congregation in this case. Several of those interviewed admitted that it could have been a factor but not something to which they would have pointed. The survey results yielded only 31 percent of respondents including that choice on their list of influential factors. In closer examination of the previous constitution and by-laws, the previous role of associate pastor was primarily seen as an assistant to the senior pastor and not an equal. In fact, in some ways, the deacons may have “outranked” any associate pastors.³⁴ Perhaps this is why the congregation did not see this role as a precursor to plural elders as was originally anticipated after the historical review.

Rival explanation 2 to research question 2: *A high degree of trust was built because the new pastor originated from this church and this is not always a repeatable factor and therefore, somewhat artificial.* This change to elder leadership was announced and completed less than two years after I arrived, which is not enough time to earn the trust necessary to make a change of this magnitude. The transition must have been greatly facilitated by the fact that I was originally from this church.

Though not anticipated, this argument was shown to be a factor in the transition. Even though a diverse constitution committee was formed and studied the proposal thoroughly, many still saw this as my project. In other cases that may have been a negative factor, but because I had grown up in this congregation, it was a slightly favorable one. Of the congregation, 76 percent said a major factor in this transition was that they trusted the pastor and this was confirmed to be a factor in the interviews.³⁵ The elders pointed

³⁴ See the previous FBC Constitution, appendix 11, By-Laws, Article I, Section II.

³⁵ It is interesting to note that there was a sharp generational difference here. While overall, 76 percent of people said this trust of the pastor was a major factor for them, only 38 percent of millennial generation congregants listed it as such. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q8. This could either be because this age group is naturally skeptical of authority or because people of this age would not have recognized me as a hometown person since I had been absent from the community for more than twenty years. If it is indeed the latter, then that is evidence that the hometown factor was somewhat influential. It is also recognized that there may be a degree of construct bias here as well. The survey participants and those

out this factor as well. In the focus group, Gary acknowledged about the pastor, “You're a part of us, you're family, your family was here and you grew up here, you had a lot at stake.”³⁶ It seems that me being originally from this church was indeed a positive factor in the transition. However, this factor does not preclude other churches from duplicating the results.³⁷ Yes, the pastor in this case had been given some degree of trust simply because of his familiarity to the congregation, but that simply highlights trust as an important factor and means that other pastors should take more time to establish trust before beginning such a major transition.

Rival explanation 3 to research question 2: *What was said to be trust in the case was actually apathy, a lack of concern for this particular subject, and therefore, a lack of opposition to it.* People saying that they trust leadership can actually mask their lack of concern for the subject at hand. The overwhelming trust in this case may demonstrate that there was also a high degree of apathy and indifference in the congregation regarding church government.

This rival explanation was anticipated, but quite difficult to diagnose. It is virtually impossible to tell if a person genuinely trusts or if they simply do not care. There is some evidence, however, for it being a factor. Consider an individual's open-ended survey response: “I trust people in leadership positions in the church so I roll with it.” On the surface, that response seems to indicate a high degree of trust, but an examination of other answers on that same survey indicate otherwise: “I can't remember” if I voted. “I don't know who [the elders] are.” “I have no real opinion on the elder

interviewed knew that I was also the researcher and may have simply wanted to be kind on their survey. This could, therefore, lessen the degree to which the hometown pastor was an influential factor.

³⁶ See appendix 10, Elder Focus Group.

³⁷ Another aspect of this hometown effect is the typical Appalachian mindset to trust only insiders. It is possible that in this particular case someone seen as an outsider could not have led the change. Further exploration of this cultural-geographic possibility was beyond the scope of this project.

topic.”³⁸ What was said to be trust may actually be a lack of concern. There were similar responses on other surveys. Furthermore, also on the survey, only 17 percent of people indicated that their own personal study was a factor in favoring the transition,³⁹ which was the lowest selected factor. While it was important to the congregation that the concept was biblical, apparently few took the time to research it on their own. There was also an effect of people not caring about church business. Church business meetings previous to the transition had been poorly attended and many members had distanced themselves from contentious and tedious church business. As was shown in the results of the transition in the previous chapter, elder leadership seems to have primarily been a change in church business for people. Since the public ministry has changed very little, much of the congregation has not noticed a difference. The way the church did business had changed, but for some of the congregation, church business was not something they cared about in the first place.⁴⁰

While this apathetic attitude was clearly a factor for some of the congregation, it is virtually indistinguishable from trust. It is important to note that the proposal still passed unanimously. Some of the congregation may not have cared, but those who did care and participated regularly in business meetings and showed up to vote on this change agreed that it was a biblical concept in the best interest of the church moving forward. In the end, trust was still a significant factor and is not negated by the presence of apathy.

³⁸ See similar answers throughout appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers.

³⁹ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q8.

⁴⁰ Another unanticipated factor that may lend evidence to the presence of apathy was revealed in the chi-squared significance tests when some of the survey questions were run against various factors. When Q8 answers were tabled with the “awareness” factor compiled from Q4, it was shown that those who were less involved in the transition process did not seem to care about anything other than trusting the pastor. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q8.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 asked, what factors, if any, influenced people in the church to oppose such a transition? The results of this question are included in this section.

Tradition. Obviously, since the motion passed unanimously, there were not any significant factors that caused the congregation to oppose the change. However, for those people that were tentative on the transition, the reasons could be grouped into one factor—tradition. Interestingly, much like the primary reason the congregation favored the change, the primary opposition really had nothing to do with an argument against elder leadership. Instead, it was about doing things the way they had always been done. The two greatest factors on the survey were that 33 percent did not understand the difference between the way the church was currently operating and the new way being proposed, while 26 percent of people just did not see a need for change.⁴¹

Those who were initially skeptical of the proposal were mostly from the older generation. Thirty-two percent of those from the “traditionals” generation (age 74 and up) were initially skeptical of the proposal compared to an average of 13 percent from the other generations.⁴² These initial fears were mostly overcome through the time of education and discussion. Some persisted in believing the change was not necessary. A decades-long misunderstanding of the role of deacons coupled with a strong preference for fully democratic congregationalism continued to be a factor for some members in the congregation. Those members still would have rather not seen the church government change. Yet, when it came time to vote, even those who felt the pull of tradition believed that the biblical evidence outweighed their nostalgia.

⁴¹ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q9.

⁴² A chi-squared test revealed a statistical significance in this generational difference with a p-value of 0.0175. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q7.

Now two years after the change, only several people still have some negative feelings toward the change. Of the four members who expressed some degree of negative feelings on their survey, three were from the “traditionals” generation.⁴³ The reasons for the skepticism continue to be a contrast with the way things had previously been done. The primary issue seems to be a lack of involvement in the process. In a fully democratic church, members are expected to pray about a decision and give their answer by way of their vote. They had grown accustomed to this method. In the new system, some of the members miss this interaction and some do not feel that they have a say on matters anymore.⁴⁴ They believe that their voice will be heard but that their authority has been lost.

First Baptist dealt with little opposition to the proposed transition, so there are not many other factors to discuss. The following rival explanation attempts to explain why there were not more objections.

Rival explanation to research question 3: *The church was not educated on the factors to oppose the transition and therefore could not have known other reasons to oppose this change.* Since many in the congregation were just hearing about elders for the first time, it is possible they did not know counterpoints to push back on the proposal.

While it may be true that members of the congregation did not know about all the arguments against elder leadership, they were given plenty of time and opportunities to discover them. Furthermore, to a certain extent, that was the job of the constitution committee. They represented the congregation in discovering whether the proposal was biblical and in the congregation’s best interest. They looked at multiple arguments against the polity and still made the recommendation to move forward.

⁴³ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q20. See footnote in that appendix regarding the chi-squared test on this factor.

⁴⁴ See appendix 6, Interviews with Betty, Ernie, and Missy.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 asked, how well did the prescribed methods of change work for this transition in this particular church? In chapter 2, the best practices for leading a significant change process in a church context were summarized into ten points. These points outlined principles that should be present if a church was going to make a successful transition. This research question sought to discover whether the case study would validate this list of principles. The following section is a discussion of each of these points in terms of First Baptist's implementation of the principles and their observed relative importance to the overall transition

Spiritual vitality and atmosphere of prayer. This point recognized the need for a healthy church spiritually and for the membership to prayerfully seek God's will in a potential transition. While First Baptist was relatively intentional about this principle in the early going and during the planning meetings, the leadership did little during the actual transition to encourage people to pray and seek God. It was more of an argument from the biblical evidence. When it came time to choose the initial elders, the church was strongly encouraged to pray and seek God's will. Overall, however, spiritual vitality does not seem to be a principle that a church could just simply manufacture. Instead, it should already be present. In this case, First Baptist had a steady rhythm of regular prayer and seeking God. The church was in a relatively healthy state during the time of the transition. One member noted on their survey, "I believe because we have a healthy church, the change went well. We trust our pastor and we trust our leaders. I'm not sure an unhealthy church could make this kind of transition."⁴⁵ Her observation is astute. This factor did prove important in the transition. However, a church's spiritual vitality and atmosphere of prayer is not something that can be generated just in time for the transition. It must already exist well before a change of this magnitude is proposed.

⁴⁵ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answer, Q22.

Rooted in shared values. This principle can be seen in First Baptist’s primary argument for seeking elder leadership. Matching a biblical model of church government was extremely important to the membership. The Bible as sole authority is a bedrock principle for First Baptist (and other Southern Baptist churches). Everyone involved recognized that if the Bible demonstrates a better model for the governing of the local church, then the church should seek it. As has already been demonstrated multiple times, this shared value was clearly a factor in this transition. An excerpt from the FAQ document reads, “We would like to match this biblical model by adding the position of elders who will provide oversight, care, and teaching to our congregation.”⁴⁶ The leadership knew rooting the change in this shared value would help everyone see the ultimate purpose in the proposed transition.

Sense of need. This principle reveals that the congregation must be convinced that the current conditions are unacceptable. Chapter 2 revealed several ways that this urgency could be created. Based on the observation of the case, several of these factors were indeed at play. First Baptist created urgency through the previously mentioned shared value of Scripture through the presence of a transformational leader that the congregation trusted, and through information and education. Each of these methods of creating a sense of need have already been shown to be factors in this transition. A sense of need can also be demonstrated as an important principle since *not* seeing the need for the change was both a common initial response and reason for opposing the transition.⁴⁷ However it is accomplished, the church must see and understand the need for the change.

Recommended or approved by a diverse group. First Baptist was extremely intentional about this step. The idea was first introduced to the deacons and staff, those

⁴⁶ See appendix 15, Constitution Change FAQ’s.

⁴⁷ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q7 and Q9.

whose roles would change the most if the proposed transition was approved, and individuals who had tremendous influence within the church. They were able to take time to study and digest the concept before the constitution committee was even charged with their task. The constitution committee was the team that would study and design the structure on behalf of the congregation. The members of this committee intentionally represented a cross section of the congregation. There were two males and three females, one person from the “traditionals” generation, two “baby boomers” and two from “gen-X.” The objective was for the congregation to feel represented in this group. When it came time to announce the proposed transition, the deacons, staff, and constitution committee were all already on the same page. The change literature is correct on this point as well and the recommendation by a diverse group was indeed a significant factor in this transition.

Humble change leadership helping through transition. This point can also be seen at play in First Baptist’s transition. In the change literature, this principle is more about the actions of the leadership than their overall personality. First Baptist’s leadership, including the constitution committee, recognized that some people would need to take the transition process slow and have lots of questions, and that some would even feel like they were losing something. The leadership took this need into account well in advance and steps were taken to make it easier for all members to digest—Q&A sessions, studies, a FAQ sheet, among other things were offered to ease the transition. Above all, however, the change leadership was intentional about making certain that no one felt that this decision was being forced upon them. An examination of the surveys and interviews bears witness to this fact. While a few members did not always agree with the proposal, they never felt like the decision was being forced. The humility of the change leadership was intentional during First Baptist’s transition and appears to have been a factor in the acceptance of the proposal.

Proper timing. There are two parts to this principle. One is the duration of the change and the other is the readiness of the congregation. The duration of First Baptist's transition from the first public mention through approval vote was twenty months.⁴⁸ However, the actual time from confirming the constitution committee to the approval was only six months, and the time from the announcement of the proposal to the approval was a brief one month. The key to this principle seems to be that the key stakeholders were contacted early the process so that when the entire congregation heard, the influencers had already made up their mind. As mentioned in answering research question 1, the duration seems to have been acceptable and even influential to the congregation as a whole. The more difficult question to answer is how this may have been proper timing in terms of readiness of the congregation. The survey and subsequent interviews both inquired as to the timing of the transition in regard to First Baptist's history, but no insightful consensus was gained. It could be noted that the time after the calling of a new pastor seemed to be sufficient. Rather than hurrying to make a change, the leadership allowed time for trust to be built after such a major change. Overall, timing does appear to have been a factor in the transition, but it also seems to be more noticeable that the wrong timing would hurt a transition than the proper timing helping it.

Strategic planning. Strategic planning can be seen in every step of First Baptist's transition. The change was not proposed haphazardly. The pastor and constitution committee went to painstaking efforts to make certain the structure was properly defined and clearly laid out in the new constitution and by-laws. Even the announcement and vote were planned well in advance and with purpose. In the end, the amount of planning and strategy may actually have been more than was necessary in this case. Many of the details were overlooked by all but a few members. However, it was better to err on the side of too much planning. The change literature is correct in that this is a factor in a transition,

⁴⁸ See appendix 1, Timeline of FBC Transition.

but it could be seen as more of an umbrella principle that encompasses timing, communication, and several of the other principles at play.

Clear and frequent communication to congregation. This principle has already been demonstrated to be a factor that influenced the congregation at First Baptist. The church already had good systems of communication in place before the transition, so the change leadership was able to work through those channels. Frequent announcements from the platform and in the bulletin along with publications that answered questions helped lead the congregation through the “neutral zone” and understand clearly what was changing. First Baptist’s leadership was careful to be matter of fact about the proposal and not exaggerate nor diminish the need to change. This balance seemed to help calm people’s fears. The transition to plural elders was a big change in terms of the way things would operate, but the church would still be focused on the things that mattered. There was a high degree of repetition and the change leadership remained clear and calm throughout. First Baptist did an excellent job with their communication and can verify that it is an obvious factor in any change endeavor.

Maintain unity through initial obstacles. First Baptist’s announcement and approval were smooth with virtually no opposition. It was relatively easy to maintain unity through initial obstacles because there were none. However, this particular principle seems to concern the time after the transition was made. Weeks, months, even years after a transition, has the organization stayed true to the plan or have they wanted to turn back? In First Baptist’s case, most of the congregation believes that the church is better off with the new government of elder leadership.⁴⁹ There have been few obstacles to overcome with the congregation. One small obstacle has been that some of the older members miss

⁴⁹ See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q20. Of those who responded to this question, 76 percent believe it is was a good move after two years, 18 percent are unsure, and 6 percent are still negative toward the transition.

being involved in church government. The church continues to do membership meetings in an effort to keep the congregation informed of what's happening, especially those that were used to participating in business meetings. The elders have even brought several items before the congregation to vote even though it was not required by the constitution and by-laws. These items have usually been missional in nature and were brought before the church to allow them to share in the approval, but it has also served to demonstrate to the congregation that their opinion still matters. While there have been minimal obstacles with the congregation, there have been more significant challenges within the elder team. All the elders are still coming to understand their new roles and it has sometimes been difficult to know exactly who is supposed to be doing what. Some of this confusion stems from the presence of a full-time point person, which seems necessary but also makes delegation difficult. Throughout these issues, however, the group has remained unified by agreeing that it is a learning process and demonstrating a willingness to continue to grow in this role. They also anticipate some obstacles when it comes time to add elders. How will these future additions change the group dynamic? Though there is some apprehension, the men are confident in what unifies them. This principle seemed to be a factor in the transition, but First Baptist may not be the best example of facing substantial obstacles.

Reinforcing new identity. It would appear that First Baptist has taken on a new identity in terms of their church polity; however, it would also appear that it is not a new identity for most of the congregation. Many in the church do not see an identity change because the services remain relevant and biblical and the ministries continue to make an impact on them and the community. Therefore, this may be an area in which First Baptist needs to work. There is still some confusion on the roles in church leadership. There is inconsistent visibility of many of the elders. The elders are seen mostly as a board in charge of business matters, not spiritual ones. There is even still uncertainty on what to

call these men.⁵⁰ Even after all the good of the transition, First Baptist has not done a good job of continuing to reinforce this new identity. This case study has revealed some continued confusion and has shown opportunities for growth in this area of reinforcing the new identity.⁵¹ First Baptist will need to continue to work at this important principle if this new type of church leadership is to remain healthy.

Overall, First Baptist's transition reflects many of the principles mentioned throughout the change literature. Adhering to these principles often meant intentional actions on the part of change leadership, but in other areas it was simply a state of being. Regardless, this case study can serve to validate that these principles of change are accurate and relevant. Other churches seeking to make this type of transition should give much attention to the wise counsel offered regarding change. The following rival explanation imagines whether it would have been possible for this church to transition without heeding these principles.

Rival explanation to research question 4: *This is simply confirmation bias and this transition could have been made whether or not these principles were present.* These factors were not actually important to the transition and their presence was merely a coincidence or a desire to see what was not there. The transition to plurality of elders could still have been made even without implementing these ideas from the change literature.

⁵⁰ The debate over what to call the elders actually continues to be quite challenging. A few want to actually call them all "elders." Some want to call them all "pastors," but this creates some difficulty distinguishing the point person. This is yet another obstacle in having a group of men that are equal in authority but not in responsibility. So, others believe that the title of "pastor" should be reserved for the staff elders and the lay elders simply be called "elders." This is the most common usage at this time, but it seems to be evidence of a structure that has simply rebranded the former deacons.

⁵¹ The survey itself seemed to function to help reinforce this identity. Several members commented that the process of filling out surveys helped them get a better understanding of the way things are done now. For example, "So by completing this survey it has helped me better understand the process we are going through on an even deeper level." See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q22.

There is no way to prove or disprove this rival explanation without some sort of experiment, but it may be a helpful thought exercise to imagine First Baptist's (or any church's) transition to elder leadership with the opposite of each of these principles:

1. Unhealthy spiritual atmosphere, shallow and even sometimes contentious
2. The proposal is based on very different values that some hold and others do not
3. There is never any explanation of why the change needs to happen
4. It is recommended by a group of people that are very similar to each other
5. The proposal does not gain the approval of the most influential people
6. The change leadership is arrogant and pushy, eager to get their way
7. The proposal does not give people time to process the information
8. The planning is haphazard, disorganized, and illogical
9. There is little communication to the congregation and even it is confusing
10. The church fractures over initial obstacles and some want to undo any change
11. The change is never spoken of again after the approval

It is easy to see from this simple thought exercise that a church operating in this manner would fail to make a successful transition. Even just a few of these attitudes or circumstances in play could wreck the entire proposal. The principles mentioned in the change literature are indeed important to making a transition in church government. They may be grouped differently or be called by different terms, but the principles are very real and should not be ignored.

Research Question 5

Research question 5 asked, what has changed in this particular church after its transition to plurality of elders? The results of this question are included in this section.

“Nothing.” The final guiding question of this case study was simply to discover what had actually changed at First Baptist in the transition to elder leadership. As has already been discussed, for the majority of people in the church, no change was perceived.

Of the respondents, 43 percent responded to that open-ended question on the survey that they saw virtually no change in how the church operated.⁵² Some admitted that there may be some change behind the scenes, but that they saw no real change in the life of the church. This result is somewhat surprising. It was not expected that the same type of transition to plural elder leadership that has wrecked other churches that have attempted it and caused so much tension in the SBC would result in the majority of a local congregation perceiving virtually no change. The verdict is still out on whether this lack of perceived change was a good result for First Baptist or not. While it has certainly made the transition simpler publicly, it may also indicate that a complete transition has not yet taken place and there will be more change coming as the church continues to better understand the role of elders.

Efficiency. Beyond the congregation's perception of a lack of change, many noted that decision-making has become more efficient and effective.⁵³ The new First Baptist constitution and by-laws still require that the congregation vote on major matters, but everything else is left up to the elders to decide. This new decision-making protocol has greatly increased the speed of decisions that matter less to the overall mission of the church. For example, previously if a major unbudgeted repair was needed, such as an air conditioning unit or on a church van, the congregation would have to convene a business meeting to decide if it was permissible to pursue these repairs. Now, that can be quickly decided by the elders with little debate. Efficiency has helped in ministry matters as well. The elders can quickly approve a new direction in children's ministry or an outreach

⁵² See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q17. Only 68 percent of the 75 people who took the survey answered this question. If the non-answers and unknowns are interpreted as also not seeing any significant change, the number goes from 43 percent up to 61 percent. Furthermore, the 75 who participated in the survey are presumed to be more involved members in the church. It is quite safe to say that the vast majority of the church has not seen a significant change in how the church operates.

⁵³ Twenty percent of respondents said this was the biggest change and 32 percent listed it as the chief benefit. See appendix 3, Congregational Survey Answers, Q17 and 18.

endeavor without congregational input. The congregation as a whole has seen this as an incredible benefit. Cheryl, a member of the constitution committee, believes this is one of the reasons for success:

You could see in business meetings, committee members and leaders weren't coming. So I think people were discouraged with that style. They would come to the meeting, a business meeting, and then the people who were over committees weren't there to give reports or whatever. And so I think that had something to do with it too, that they thought this would be more efficient.⁵⁴

The leadership agrees and enjoys the time savings of making relatively minor decisions without a business meeting. Efficiency has been a definite benefit from the transition.

Involvement. This newfound efficiency actually creates another big change that the congregation has witnessed. The levels of involvement have shifted. Virtually equal numbers of people on the survey listed *increased* involvement as those who listed *decreased* involvement as major changes stemming from this transition.⁵⁵ They have seen that more people are involved in the leadership of the church now. Previously, it was frequently the pastor alone bringing proposals and reports to the congregation. Now, they see other men getting involved in this role and under their direction, more men and women bringing proposals and reports to the congregation. In this way, participation in leadership has increased in the church. However, many members also believe that there is now less involvement from the congregation. Primarily, this is a complaint about personal awareness. Whereas before, an individual in the congregation might have been aware that an air conditioning unit was broken or that an outreach program had changed its focus slightly, and had even been able to express an opinion on the matter through their vote, they were now unable to do so and feel left out of the process. Unsurprisingly, this different perception of involvement is skewed generationally with younger members

⁵⁴ See appendix 8, Interview with Cheryl.

⁵⁵ Fourteen percent see more leadership involvement, while 12 percent see less congregational involvement, a difference of just one person. See appendix 3, Q17.

noting increased involvement in leadership while older members express a lack of congregational involvement. Overall, this is seen as a positive result of the transition from First Baptist's leadership. The elders and staff would like to continue this trend of getting members out of the habit of focusing on administrative roles in the church and instead concentrating on possibilities for living out the mission.

Other changes. In the arguments made for a plurality of elders, the precedent literature noted some other possible changes. Has First Baptist experienced any of these? One of those benefits was increased accountability for the pastor. While this benefit is currently minimal, it is already evident and continues to grow as the elders figure out their roles. Biweekly meetings with accountability and prayer have strengthened the assurance the church has of their leadership staying the course. As a result, there is increased stability having more men in this role than just one. The difference is almost palpable. Decisions are not made on the whim of one individual that then gets the approval of the congregation (whether that is the pastor or another member). Instead a solid foundation of men seek God and correct the course when and where necessary. Another presumed benefit of the plural elder model is less responsibility on the pastor. After two years, that benefit has yet to come to fruition at First Baptist. The workload has actually been heavier during this time because it includes leading the elders. In general, delegation actually takes more time up front and that has been true in this case. There is still a heavy influence and responsibility of the point person right now, but as other elders continue to learn and grow into a different type of ministry, the church will certainly see a more distributed, and thereby more effective, workload.

For the congregation at First Baptist, not much has changed. For the leadership, plural elders has proven to be a more efficient and effective model of church government. The changes have been beneficial to the life of the church. While those benefits are currently seen primarily in the area of business matters and decision making, First Baptist believes that this change will also soon be paying spiritual dividends as these elders

disciple other potential leaders, continually affecting change in the church and in the community.

Generalizations to Other Churches

There is much to learn from First Baptist's case of transitioning to plural elders. Obviously, many details will not perfectly match other churches, but some principles can certainly be generalized, especially to other Southern Baptist churches that may want to make this transition. The following are some of these generalized principles from which other churches may benefit.

Understand the Church

The Bible may make a clear case for plural elders, and a transition to this type of government may be a great step toward correcting a host of issues with the common SBC single-elder congregationalism, but that does not mean the transition needs to happen immediately. As has been shown, relationships and trust are often more significant in the transition than doctrine. It is wise for leaders wanting to pursue this direction to take time to understand the history of the church, learn the make-up of the congregation, and build trust by genuinely caring for the church's needs. A leader should know the people in the church that carry the most influence and work on building solid relationships with them. Change leaders should understand the generational attitudes and shifts occurring in their church. They should understand what some people stand to lose in a change of this magnitude and be able to see the situation from their vantage point. Before it ever comes time to put such a proposal to a vote, the leader should already understand the church enough to know whether it will be approved.

Build on the Bible

The common value among Southern Baptists desiring to change their church polity seems to be a high view of Scripture. Though there are certainly other practical reasons to make this change, a desire to match the biblical view will often be the driving

force in SBC churches. The biblical evidence is ample for plural elders. This evidence is most likely the only source of the much-needed feeling of urgency in an established church. Few other opportunities will exist to realize the necessary level of urgency in a church government transition. The church needs to be educated on the biblical model along with the reasons it is beneficial even in a modern context. This shared value provides a solid foundation for the possibility of changing the church's government.

Involve other People

If the proposition to change simply comes from the existing deacon board that wants to now be called "elders" and take some of the decisions away from the church, then the idea will most likely be met with opposition. Instead, a representative sampling from the congregation needs to help lead the change. They should be a diverse group willing to study and humbly present their findings to the church. They should ultimately be the ones leading the change. Having the right people involved is key to a successful transition.

Plan and Communicate Intentionally

It would be wise for any leaders desiring to make this transition to understand to some degree the process of organizational change. Careful and deliberate steps need to be taken throughout the process. This case study has validated many of the suggestions from organizational change authors. Strategy and clarity are a must for success in any change, including transitioning a church government. This intentionality should also include a consideration of the structure of government that will be put in place. The details are important. Taking too big of a step in an established church could spell disaster. Attempting to move an involved, congregational, full-democratic church to complete elder-rule is probably not wise and will be met with much opposition. The time, place, delivery, tone, frequency, and mode of the information should all be considered.

None of these factors can be taken lightly but should be done intentionally with the congregation's best interest in mind.

Select the Right Elders

Several members from First Baptist declared that had the wrong men been selected, all the work on the proposed transition would have been for nothing. The entire process would have been seen as a failure because of the result. It could be tempting for change leadership to see the approval of a new church government as the end goal, but the task is not finished until the right men are installed as elders. Churches should consider allowing the congregation to have significant input in the selection of elders (even churches that design a structure of self-perpetuating elder-rule would be wise to allow the congregation some degree of voice in the matter) without turning the selection process into a popularity contest. The scriptural guidelines are there for a reason. Just because someone owns a business or oversees hundreds of people does not necessarily make him qualified to be an elder in the church. The congregation must pay close attention to these biblical qualifications. Gentleness and hospitality are just as important as doctrine and leadership. Designing a system or structure that allows for the wrong elders to be selected could ultimately derail the transition after it seemed to be accepted by the congregation.

Further Research

Throughout this case study, multiple opportunities for further research were discovered. Any of the following topics could provide even more insight into the design and function of church polity and particularly the changing government of Southern Baptist churches.

What are other Southern Baptist churches doing? First Baptist is just one case study of a church that has made the transition to plural elders from a single-elder congregational structure. Hundreds more have at least attempted this change. How did

other churches handle their transition? What structure did they use? Did they have similar results? How big is this trend in the SBC and will it increase in the coming years?

Will the younger generations continue the traditional structures of leadership in the SBC? This case study and anecdotal evidence suggest that young people do not enjoy being involved in church business and therefore do not seem to care for the traditional concept of business meetings. Several aspects of this study revealed some sharp generational differences. Young people seem to want to focus on the mission more than the organization. This missional focus may be a welcome trend, but what will established churches do if they refuse to change the way they do business?

What is the role of deacons in light of elder leadership? Southern Baptists have a rich history with the role of deacon. There have been many successful ministries built around deacon family visitation and care. Unfortunately, the role became a dual one at many churches and the deacons also assumed a governing responsibility and incredible authority. How should this change if a church transitions to a government that recaptures the biblical idea of deacon along with elders? Furthermore, if deacon is no longer primarily a teaching and leading role, will more churches begin to allow female deacons? This role needs to be clarified since it has for so long been confused with that of elder in the Southern Baptist church.

How can church leadership tell the difference between trust and apathy? Within a church setting, people frequently say they trust the leadership, but further investigation sometimes reveals that they simply do not care that much about what church leadership is doing. This question was witnessed to some degree in this case study. With an increasingly consumeristic view of church, members see pastors or elders as service providers and feel the freedom to take their membership elsewhere. How can leadership keep people engaged in the business of the church while also maintaining a focus on the mission?

These are several examples of topics that could be researched further. The appendices from this case study may also provide substantial opportunities to pursue ideas further.

Conclusion

The transition to elder leadership at First Baptist Waverly has provided a case study of a phenomenon that is growing in the Southern Baptist Convention as some churches move toward what they believe to be a more biblical model of church government. Through various case study methods, a thorough understanding of this transition at First Baptist illustrates many of the principles discovered in the precedent literature. Much was learned about an elder-led church government in the context of an SBC church and about church change in general. Plural elder leadership has proven to be a great fit at First Baptist, a typical SBC church. The church remains overall congregationally governed and the members now see their polity as reflecting the biblical model. Over the two years since implementation, it has greatly increased efficiency and involvement and there is a drive toward a realization of the spiritual benefits as well. There is more of a feeling of stability and the membership is learning to interact with the mission of the church rather than just the operations of the organization. First Baptist was able to make a smooth transition to a new church polity because they understood the scope of the task and respected the process of change. Though the transition still has a way to go to match the desired structure that was initially planned, the change itself can be deemed a success. The proposal to change the type of church government was approved unanimously and the church did not lose a single member because of the transition.⁵⁶ First Baptist is now led by a group of elders that continue to better understand the biblical role of leading a church and humbly embrace that role. This case study has demonstrated

⁵⁶ First Baptist has even gained some membership recently *because* of the transition. “Actually it was what kind of solidified our desire to join the church.” See appendix 3, Interview with Mike.

that it was the correct move for First Baptist to transition to a plurality of elders and that they made the change well.

APPENDIX 1

TIMELINE OF FBC WAVERLY TRANSITION TO ELDER LEADERSHIP

Sep 2015 New pastor is called. This new pastor was originally from the church but moved away for 25 years. He was still very familiar with the congregation.

Nov 2015 Possible transition to elder-led church is mentioned in a long list of proposed changes at church. This document (that was given to the deacons and staff and later shared with the congregation) was very positive about what was going on at the church while also clearly calling for the need to change in several areas, including church government.

Oct-Nov 2016 Church polity discussion with deacons and staff

Feb 2017 Constitution Committee approved and begins to meet. Critique of FBC Constitution and By-Laws (excerpts from these original by-laws can be found in Appendix 11) presented to Constitution Committee. This critique advocated for “Elder Leadership while retaining autonomy and overall democratic process.” The committee was given material to study for an overview of church polity options and their biblical support.

Mar-Apr 2017 Elder structure is discussed in the Constitution Committee meetings

May-Jun 2017 Final touches are put on the new constitution and by-laws and shown to deacons and staff for input. Changes are made where necessary.

Jul 9, 2017 Sermon from 1 Timothy 3 (within a series on 1 Timothy) on church leadership. The church is told about the proposed change in church government and invited to hear a presentation on the history of elders the following Wednesday. See Appendix 13.

Jul 12, 2017 Bible study on a biblical overview of elders, included in Appendix 14.

Jul-Aug 2017 Copies of the new constitution and by-laws (Appendix 12) along with FAQ sheets (Appendix 15) regarding the proposed changes are made available to the congregation. Letter goes out to congregation. Church bulletin and announcements list the upcoming business meeting along with the availability of New Constitution and By-Laws and FAQ sheets.

Aug 6, 2017 In a sermon on 1 Timothy 5, the church is reminded of the proposed change and the upcoming business meeting

Aug 13, 2017 Business meeting. The proposed constitution and by-laws pass unanimously with very little discussion. Nomination forms are distributed to those in attendance and made available to the rest of the congregation to nominate men to serve as elders.

Aug-Sep 2017 Congregation prayerfully nominates men to be elders. They are frequently reminded of the process in announcements.

Sep 10, 2017 Membership meeting. The initial group of elders are approved and installed.

Sep 2017 Elders begin meeting and assuming their new roles at FBC Waverly

APPENDIX 2

CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY

Church Transition to a Plurality of Elders: A Case Study

Congregational Survey

As a congregation, we changed our constitution two years ago and along with it, our church government to include a group leading the church called “Elders.” This survey is to discover how you think that transition went and how you believe this form of church government is working now. The research in which you are about to participate is designed to describe our church’s transition to elder leadership. This research is being conducted by Josh Remy for purposes of dissertation research. In this research, you will be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church, the transition to elder leadership, and the current state of leadership in our church. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Q1. How old are you? Are you male or female?

[] years old [] Male [] Female

Q2. When did you first begin attending First Baptist Church in Waverly?

Began attending in... [] (Year)

Q3. Please describe your role at the church *during the time of transition* two years ago (deacon, staff, ministry team leader, teacher, church member, etc.).

Q4. Which best describes your level of awareness of this change to elder leadership?*

- [] I was very aware and was very involved in learning about the possible change.
- [] I was aware of the change and researched some, but did not get very involved.
- [] I was somewhat aware of a proposed change, but didn’t look into it at all.
- [] I was somewhat aware, but purposely stay away from church business matters.
- [] I was not aware of the change until after the fact.
- [] I was not aware of the change until right now.

*If you were not very involved in learning about this change in leadership structure, some of these questions may be irrelevant for you, but your answers still matter. Please do your

best to answer them, but feel free to leave ones blank that simply do not fit your situation. Consider leaving a note at the end explaining why you didn't want to be more involved.

Q5. How did you first hear about the proposed change to the constitution and to the leadership structure?

Q6. How would you have announced the change differently?

Q7. Did you *initially* think that the proposal to change to elder leadership was a good idea? Why or why not?

Q8. Which of the following things do you think helped you *favor* the constitution change and specifically the transition to elders? (check all that apply or add your own "other")

- We elected a constitution committee to guide the change
- There was plenty of time between the announcement and the vote
- There were opportunities to discuss and ask questions
- It was demonstrated and explained from the Bible
- I know of other churches that were led by elders and it was good
- I read and researched on my own and decided it was a good idea
- I trusted the pastor to lead us in the right direction
- There were other people that were in favor of the transition that I trusted
- We already had associate pastors, so it didn't seem like a big change
- Other:

Q9. Which of the following things *concerned* you about a transition to elders? (check all that apply or add your own "other")

- I didn't understand why a change was needed
- I didn't see a difference between elders and deacons
- I associate elders with other denominations
- I negatively associate elders with Reformed theology
- I didn't feel it was required by the Bible
- I felt the congregation would lose too much authority
- I felt like a few people would have too much authority
- The plan did not allow for women to be elders
- I know of other churches that were led by elders and it didn't go well
- I read and researched on my own and decided it was not a good idea
- I did not trust the pastor to lead us in the right direction
- I do not like change in general
- Other:

Q10. Did you change your mind on any of your concerns throughout the process? If so, what concern changed and what helped it change?

Q11. Did you vote in the decision to change the constitution and make the change to elders?

I voted FOR the change

I voted AGAINST the change

No, I didn't vote (please explain why not below)

I can't remember

If you did not vote, explain why not: _____

Q12. Were you pleased with the nomination process? Did you nominate any men to be an elder?

Q13. What do you feel are the most important qualities necessary in an elder?

Q14. Do you feel the right men were selected? What would you have done differently?

Q15. Have all of the elders been visible enough? Who is currently serving as an elder?

Q16. Is there anything in FBC's history that you think affected this change?

Q17. What would you say has changed the most since making the decision to be an elder-led church?

Q18. In your opinion, what have been the biggest advantages in changing to an elder-led church?

Q19. In your opinion, what have been the biggest challenges in changing to an elder-led church?

Q20. Looking back over the last 2 years since this change, do you think it was a good idea to make the transition to an elder-led church? Why or why not?

Q21. Is there anything about how the elders function right now that you would like to see change?

Q22. Is there anything else about this change in church government that you would like to note?

Q23. (OPTIONAL) If you feel comfortable doing so, please share your name and best contact information. Your contact information will not be used unless clarification is needed regarding one of your answers or you wish to participate further.

Name: []

E-mail Address: []

Phone Number: []

Q24. If clarification or follow up is needed, how would you like to be contacted?

E-mail Phone Text

Q25. Would you be interested in helping with this research more by answering some more questions in person?

Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this survey. Your answers will be very helpful in this research.

APPENDIX 3

CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY
ANSWER COMPILATION

Q1. How old are you? Are you male or female?

100% Responded

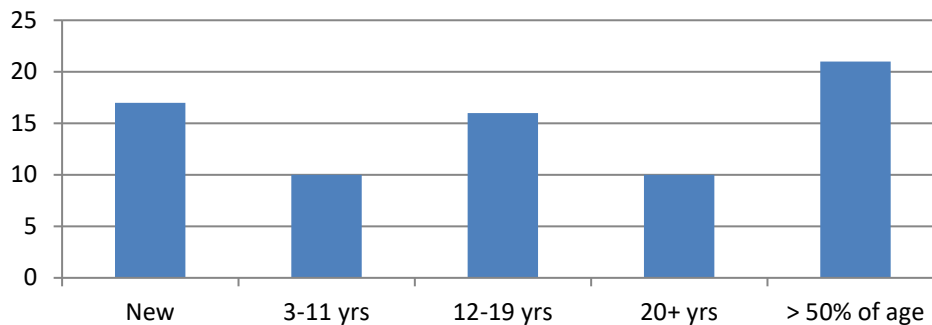
<u>GENERATION</u> (yrs old)	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Millennials (20-37)	3	5
Gen X (38-55)	8	10
Baby Boomers (56-73)	9	18
Traditionals (74+)	7	15

Q2. When did you first begin attending First Baptist Church in Waverly?

99% Responded

HISTORY: Years attended at transition distributed into 5 groups of people:

- 1- Those new to the church (0-2 years at transition) - have only known this pastor
- 2- Attended 3-11 years – came during one of the previous two pastors
- 3- Attended 12-20 years – came during a period of growth during a previous pastor
- 4- Attended 20+ years but later in life – have attended for a long time, but have been at another church as well
- 5- Attended over half their life – essentially this is the only church they know



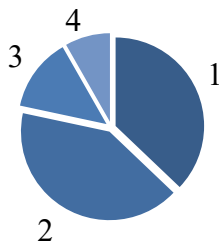
Q3. Please describe your role at the church *during the time of transition* two years ago (deacon, staff, ministry team leader, teacher, church member, etc.).
91% Responded

Distributed into 3 groups based on INVOLVEMENT:	<u>Count</u>
1- Previous church leadership position	10 (15%)
2- Very active member (teacher, volunteer, etc.)	17 (25%)
3- Regular member	41 (60%)

Q4. Which best describes your level of awareness of this change to elder leadership?
99% Responded

AWARENESS of the change:

- 1- I was very aware and was very involved in learning about the possible change.
 - 2- I was aware of the change and researched some, but did not get very involved.
 - 3- I was somewhat aware of a proposed change, but didn't look into it at all.
 - 4- I was somewhat aware, but purposely stay away from church business matters.
 - 4- I was not aware of the change until after the fact.
 - 4- I was not aware of the change until right now.
- (last three response categories were combined for analysis)



1- Very Aware and Involved	36%
2- Aware, Not Very Involved	40%
3- Somewhat Aware	13%
4- Not aware or Involved	8%

Q5. How did you first hear about the proposed change to the constitution and to the leadership structure?
96% Responded

NOTICE was received...

1- Through a church leadership meeting	16%
2- At a church business meeting	17%
3- At a church service or class	49%
4- In a letter from the church	3%
5- Directly from the pastor	7%
6- Directly from another person at church	9%

Q6. How would you have announced the change differently?

80% Responded

- I thought it was good how it was handled
- wouldn't have, it was brought up numerous times, scripture backed, presented well
- I feel like this is how I would prefer to have received this announcement, in person.
- I think it was announced in a very professional and understanding way.
- I feel that the congregation was given a thorough explanation prior to changing
- No change
- It was announced appropriately.
- It was announced appropriately
- Done same way
- Nothing different
- No different
- Thought that was a good way to announce
- No change
- I didn't find anything wrong with the way it was announced.
- The way it was handled seemed appropriate
- I think Josh did a good job of easing the congregation into it. First of all making people aware of the possibility for change. Then discussing the importance for the change along with the need. Then allowing feedback and time for people to digest it before bringing it to a vote.
- N/A
- No
- None at all - Communication and Biblical support was well presented to the congregation.
- no change
- I'm not sure I would change much. The announcement to change was given with Biblical support of why it needed to happen, so it was received well.
- I don't think I would have.
- I wouldn't have
- I wouldn't have done anything differently. The proposed change gave members plenty of time to review, and ask questions.
- No change
- I do not know
- n/a
- no difference
- same
- put in the form of a question
- no different
- this was acceptable
- don't know
- I wouldn't change it
- no differently
- nothing

- would not have changed it
- I don't know.
- n/a
- I thought the proposal was announced well, would not have made any changes
- wouldn't
- somewhat
- satisfied, wouldn't change
- I liked the way it was presented
- perhaps with a detailed letter prior to church meeting so that members would have a better understanding of difference and more time to consider a change intelligently.
- I don't see any difference
- not
- wouldn't have
- add more kitchen helpers
- business meeting was the proper way
- business meeting was the proper way
- no change
- no change, handled well
- No differently
- It was done well
- No change
- Wouldn't change it
- I don't believe I would have. The change came on the tail end (as I remember it) of a very good series on the structure of the church. I believe that there was plenty of discussion and time to consider and pray about the decision.
- None
- no different

100% of respondents approved or mostly approved of the way the transition was announced

Q7. Did you *initially* think that the proposal to change to elder leadership was a good idea? Why or why not?

91% Responded

Yes [positive toward the change]

- Yes, because of the explanation by Leadership as to why it would be good for the church.
- Good, so well laid out in scripture how could we not?
- Yes, because it gives more of a biblical view.
- Yes. Think it has a scriptural example
- Yes. It did not seem like it was that much different and all the people recommended were godly men involved in the Church already.
- Absolutely; it is how the New Testament churches were established.
- Yes; shared input regarding services
- Yes. Gives elders more authority.
- Yes. I thought our pastor would lead us to the correct decision.
- Yes. I was for the idea for a while. I think it more closely aligns to what we see in scripture.
- Yes. Scripture discusses the roles
- Yes its scriptural
- Yes, it added a layer of service
- Very good idea - Strong Biblical support for the role of Elder in the NT Church.
- Yes, because it is Biblical
- Yes, it differentiated the roles of deacon and elder vs having the previous role of deacon to cover both elder role and deacon role combined.
- Good idea. I trust my church administration, and I believe in their vision of the church and its future.
- Yes
- Yes
- yes. it's better for more than one opinion
- the Bible calls us to have elders
- yes, I liked the idea. I feel that it spreads the leadership of the church to more people.
- yes, it's more what the Bible teaches. It keeps everyone accountable. Very important!
- Absolutely. Because it is the biblical pattern for leadership of local bodies of believers.
- sure
- It's fine
- Yes!
- Yes, biblical
- Yes, had seen it work in a previous church
- yes. I think it resulted in more involvement for members and takes pressure off pastor to do/organize everything.
- Yes, ok, following God's order and the church is big enough to have such leaders
- yes. following God's order and the church is big enough to have such leaders.

- Yes, streamline church decisions and not become bogged down at business meetings
- Yes, I had heard about it before and felt it was a biblical approach.

Unsure but interested [positive toward the change]

- Initially, I was interested in learning about an elder led church.
- I was sure it would be good, given the quality of Christian men within our church
- I was open to it, with caution
- good. change is good.
- i thought others knew more reasons to change than I
- I was unsure but open to idea

Unsure [neutral toward the change]

- Honestly at the time I was fairly new to the church and to the structure of a Southern Baptist church, as I previously attended a Methodist church.
- I don't know what the difference is in Elder and Deacon
- Did not understand why but i trust the leadership of the church and figured they had a reason for the change
- Neither good or bad. Untraditional and intriguing were my thoughts.
- I don't think well
- no thought as to whether good or not since I had no experience with this
- did not have an opinion one way or another
- Initially I was not sure, but trusted church leadership
- very uncertain until I reviewed the structure that stated non-staff elders were in the majority
- was not sure. Being a deacon I had some doubts because of the possibility of me becoming an elder. I was not sure how the congregation would respond.
- I wasn't for sure - I did wonder if the pastor wanted this transition so that some issues or decisions could be dealt with with a smaller group of men – some things are hard to accomplish with too many opinions. Likewise, the pastor could have some to step forward when he himself was absent or away
- I am undecided
- I was initially skeptical, as one should be to investigate how God's word aligns relate, informs or contradicts.
- Unsure, not enough understanding of the term “elder”

Unsure but doubtful [negative toward the change]

- Didn't think it mattered.
- Frankly, I wondered why the need to change
- didn't matter
- didn't matter to me
- I did not initially understand the reason for the change.
- I didn't really see the need / advantage

No [negative toward the change]

- No, our church was going thru many changes.

- No I didn't see anything wrong with how the church was working
- No - No term limits for a few making all the decisions.
- no I did not think it was a good idea. because I associate elders with other denominations.
- No. I did not see the need.
- no - wasn't clear on the responsibilities
- no
- no, because I knew nothing about it. Did not know Baptist churches had elders.

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CHANGE
(initial feelings, reported after 2 yrs)

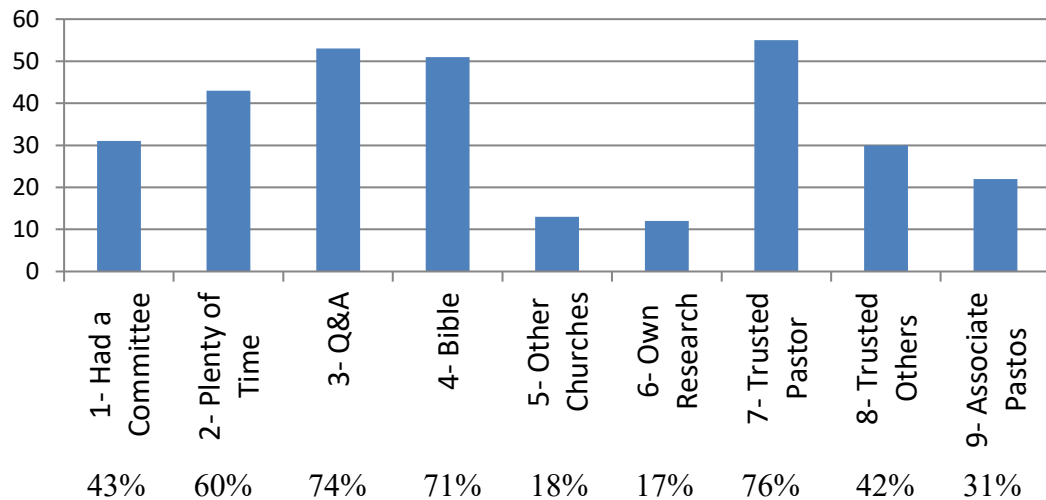
	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Negative</u>
OVERALL	59%	21%	21%
Men	56%	19%	15%
Women	52%	19%	21%
GENERATION ¹			
Millennials	25%	63%	13%
Gen-X	72%	11%	11%
Baby Boomer	63%	15%	15%
Traditionals	36%	14%	32%
HISTORY			
New	71%	24%	6%
3-11 years	60%	10%	30%
12-19 years	44%	25%	19%
20+ years	30%	0%	40%
> 50% of life	52%	24%	14%
INVOLVEMENT			
Leader	70%	20%	10%
Active Member	59%	24%	12%
Regular Member	46%	17%	27%
AWARENESS			
Very Aware and Involved	70%	11%	19%
Aware, Not Very Involved	57%	20%	13%
Somewhat Aware	30%	20%	40%
Not Aware or Involved	13%	38%	13%

¹ This category was demonstrated to be statistically significant (not a result of random sampling) through a chi-squared test. The p-value was determined to be 0.0175. It is skewed toward an initial neutrality of the youngest generation and an initial negative attitude from the oldest generation.

Q8. Which of the following things do you think helped you *favor* the constitution change and specifically the transition to elders? (check all that apply or add your own “other”)

99% Responded

- 1- We elected a constitution committee to guide the change
- 2- There was plenty of time between the announcement and the vote
- 3- There were opportunities to discuss and ask questions
- 4- It was demonstrated and explained from the Bible
- 5- I know of other churches that were led by elders and it was good
- 6- I read and researched on my own and decided it was a good idea
- 7- I trusted the pastor to lead us in the right direction
- 8- There were other people that were in favor of the transition that I trusted
- 9- We already had associate pastors, so it didn't seem like a big change



Other:

- Explanations of why it would be beneficial.
- We have many men who live faithful quality selfless servanthood, Christ-like lives for candidates
- General attitude of servant leadership was already established in the congregation.

	constitution committee	plenty of time	opportunities to discuss	explained from the bible	other churches	researched on my own	trusted the pastor	other people	associate pastors
OVERALL	43%	60%	74%	71%	18%	17%	76%	42%	31%
Men	48%	63%	74%	78%	19%	26%	70%	41%	26%
Women	38%	54%	69%	63%	17%	10%	75%	40%	31%
GENERATION ²									
Millennials	13%	38%	75%	75%	13%	25%	38%	38%	25%
Gen-X	44%	72%	78%	67%	11%	11%	78%	44%	28%
Baby Boomer	56%	70%	74%	78%	30%	22%	81%	33%	30%
Traditionals	32%	36%	59%	55%	9%	9%	73%	45%	32%
HISTORY									
New	53%	76%	100%	88%	35%	18%	76%	53%	29%
3-11 years	50%	60%	60%	70%	20%	10%	50%	10%	30%
12-19 years	63%	50%	75%	56%	13%	13%	81%	50%	25%
20+ years	20%	50%	60%	50%	10%	10%	90%	10%	40%
> 50% of life	24%	52%	57%	71%	10%	24%	71%	48%	29%
INVOLVEMENT									
Leader	60%	70%	90%	100%	20%	50%	80%	30%	20%
Active Member	29%	71%	88%	76%	12%	18%	76%	47%	18%
Regular Member	44%	51%	61%	56%	20%	7%	73%	44%	37%
AWARENESS ³									
Very Aware and Involved	67%	78%	96%	85%	30%	41%	81%	41%	26%
Aware, Not Very Involved	33%	60%	70%	77%	13%	3%	67%	40%	37%
Somewhat Aware	20%	30%	40%	30%	0%	0%	70%	50%	30%
Not Aware or Involved	13%	13%	25%	25%	13%	0%	75%	25%	13%

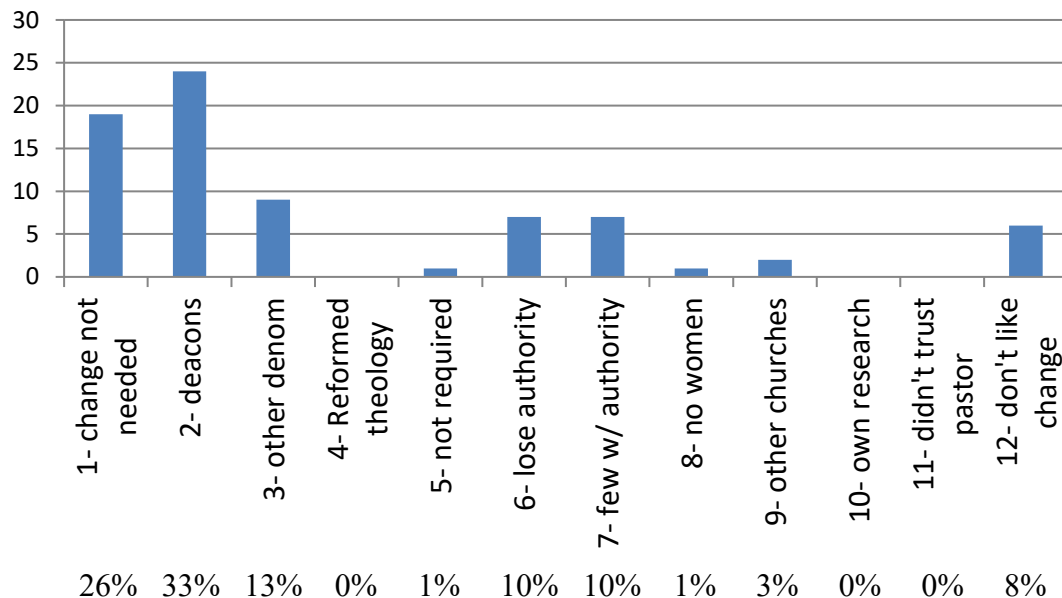
² Boxed categories were shown to be statistically significant (not due to random sampling) with a chi-squared test p-value of less than 0.05. Some of these distributions validated what was observed from other case study methods. Others were not explored further.

³ AWARENESS (and to a lesser degree INVOLVEMENT) proved to be a very interesting factor. The constitution committee, the time and opportunity to discuss, the demonstration from the Bible, and personal research were all skewed heavily towards the more aware and involved (somewhat predictably). However, trust was not. The trust of the pastor appears to have been the dominant factor for the uninvolved.

Q9. Which of the following things **concerned** you about a transition to elders? (check all that apply or add your own “other”)

72% Responded

- 1- I didn't understand why a change was needed
- 2- I didn't see a difference between elders and deacons
- 3- I associate elders with other denominations
- 4- I negatively associate elders with Reformed theology
- 5- I didn't feel it was required by the Bible
- 6- I felt the congregation would lose too much authority
- 7- I felt like a few people would have too much authority
- 8- The plan did not allow for women to be elders
- 9- I know of other churches that were led by elders and it didn't go well
- 10- I read and researched on my own and decided it was not a good idea
- 11- I did not trust the pastor to lead us in the right direction
- 12- I do not like change in general



Other:

- I was not educated enough at the time on Southern Baptist structure to understand why it would make a difference.
- I needed to understand the differences in how the church would function under elders rather than the way we were functioning.
- I did have some concerns on who the elders would be.
- Just how the congregation would handle the change.
- The change with servant leadership being pronounced allowed a good transition.

Q10. Did you change your mind on any of your concerns throughout the process? If so, what concern changed and what helped it change?

63% responded

68% of respondents answered that they did not change their mind or that they didn't have any concerns to begin with

The rest shared what helped change their mind through the process...

- Studying the Bible regarding elders and reading from authors who have studied the structure of church leadership helped me.
- Became more aware of the role of elders and how their expertise in planning and administration could be helpful to the pastor.
- I think the congregation has accepted it pretty well; however, I wonder if most truly understand the transition, since Josh is still called the pastor and Val is the associate Pastor according to most... Not sure we've truly transitioned in the minds of many.
- I was open and my questions were answered at meetings.
- I thought it was very well presented and very well accepted.
- It seemed to be an easy change and it went smoothly. I heard of no problems. Nothing much really changed.
- Even though it is Bible directed, I don't see any change in our church.
- I was never really against it, I trusted church leadership to do what was right
- The need. Now see it was good for our church
- I changed my mind through study and discussion with the committee.
- I became more comfortable as it was researched and as congregation was informed and seemed to have very few concerns.
- I honestly have not seen or felt much change. Everything seems to run smoothly. I trust the men elected so I can rest about the change.
- I guess my biggest concern was, why change for the sake of change? I did not (and still in some ways do not) understand the difference between a Deacon and an Elder. However, I believe the change to be a good one. I have never believed that the responsibility for the entire church should rest on the shoulders of one man. A group of Godly men can do the job much better.
- An understanding of who would serve as elders, the structure of the new testament church, and peace regarding change.
- Through meetings with helpful discussions on what the Bible says about Elders and Deacons

Q11. Did you vote in the decision to change the constitution and make the change to elders?

97% responded

78% - I voted FOR the change

1% - I voted AGAINST the change⁴

10% - No, I didn't vote (please explain why not below)

11% - I can't remember

Responses regarding why someone didn't vote or other comments:

- I can't remember if I was present when the vote was taken. However, if I was here I would have voted for it.
- Very few members will vote against anything the Pastor brings before them concerning the church. Trusting in the Pastor's proposals.
- I did not attend the meeting
- undecided
- wasn't there
- I wasn't aware
- I'm a mother of young children, it's very difficult for me to attend meetings, and I did not learn enough about the issue in morning services

Q12. Were you pleased with the nomination process? Did you nominate any men to be an elder?

91% responded

97% were pleased with the nomination process.

49% nominated someone to be an elder.

⁴ The vote to approve the new constitution and by-laws was unanimous, so this one individual saying they voted against the proposal was mistaken. This does at least show that this individual was against the change.

Q13. What do you feel are the most important qualities necessary in an elder?

89% responded

- Mature spiritually, Servants, above Reproach, Trustworthy, Honest, respected in the church and community
- The qualities that the Bible lists in I Timothy 3.
- a proven life style of trust and leadership
- God's servant.
- They should be a great leader, knowledgeable of The Bible, and approachable to bring concerns to.
- To be there in helping make important decisions regarding our church.
- Timothy 3:1-7
- Feel each quality mentioned I. Scripture is of equal necessity for a well grounded leader
- Living what you teach or preach and loving the Lord God with all your heart, soul and mind. Serving in a leadership position previously in the Church that was positively reflected.
- Living according to scripture
- Faith, knowledge and wisdom
- Honesty, integrity, humility. Love and concern for others. Evidence of a Christ centered life
- Being a man of the Bible. One who studies the word and reflects the qualities listed in 1 Timothy 3
- Biblical qualities
- Praying before any decision is made concerning church matters. Patience.
- Godly men, believe the bible
- Godly Man.
- Ability to make decisions for the church, godly men.
- Of course truly following Jesus Christ and having a life consistent with scripture for a decent period of time(years). Humility and ability to listen yet make hard decisions.
- Stability of service to the Lord. Steadfast!
- Displays Godliness
- Godly, leadership skills, soft skills, compassionate, sound theology
- Spiritual maturity, Bible knowledge, Personal Walk with God, Leader of His own household, respected in the church and community
- Servant with Biblical qualifications and life style characteristics on display.
- Biblical guidelines
- The qualities mentioned in Timothy and Titus
- Mature Christian as evidenced by their life and involvement.
- Able to rightly divide the Word of Truth and effectively communicate It with others, exhibit authentic Godly character and leadership in his home as well as in the world.
- Clear understanding of God's Word, Leadership, Commitment, Loyalty
- An elder who reads the Word, teaches, and active in the church
- don't know
- belief in God.

- their testimony and husband of one wife
- leadership and trust
- Christ-centered, faithful, wise, life experiences, non-conforming, discerning
- Christian; his life reflects His love for Jesus; leadership quality; concern for others to know Jesus
- 1 Tim 3:1-4; Titus 1:6-9 - Faithful, blameless, obedient, kind, not mean or quick tempered, hospitable, love, self controlled, disciplined
- I Tim 3:1-4; Titus 1:6-9
- a man who you can see loves God and is obedient to Him
- those listed in scripture only
- integrity, faithfulness, Christ-centered
- honesty
- Believe in one God. A member in good standing, faithful worker in the church, honest, loves people, believe Jesus Christ is the only way to get to heaven
- better have a good, supportive wife
- strong presence in the church, a strong faith in Jesus and God, long time member, caring, passionate personality
- Biblical Knowledge, Compassion and Concern for the church and the church family
- family
- read 1 Timothy 3 and Titus
- A man that seeks GOD'S glory first and foremost and loves his neighbor second
- Display exemplary Christ centered life. Faithful to gospel and FBC. Be a member at least 3 years and active in at least one ministry.
- Kindness, helpful
- Trustworthy, kind
- patience, love, decisiveness, truth (gospel)
- Good
- know scripture, have patience, love God and people, know how to teach, talk with people, witness, visit, have answers
- know scripture, have patience, love God and people, know how to teach, talk with people, witness, visit, have answers
- the same required of deacons
- Spiritual leadership, biblical led life style
- honest, approachable, biblical lifestyle reflected daily
- A man after God, above reproach, Good example in church, community, and family
- Trustworthiness and their experiences in the church
- Servant leadership
- Spiritually grounded and mature
- Obviously they must be Godly men who have a firm understanding of the message of Scripture. I believe it is important for the leaders in the church to be married, and to have (or have raised) a Godly family. I believe that they must be leaders in life by example, and I believe that a position such as Elder would require a huge dose of humility and a clear gift of discernment. They should have a firm grasp on who God is and how He works in His people and what the Church is to Him.

- Committed to the authority and infallibility of scripture, consistent spiritual fruit in both public and private life, tested integrity, humility, high moral standards, passion for God's heart (missions, service, discipleship, etc), wisdom both spiritually, practically, socially, and financially, and active involvement in discipleship inside and outside the home.
- Faithful and pure heart for Christ, lacking of ego, ability to share Gods word to others, strong marriage and family, humility
- Faithfully living a life of obedience to Christ. Know and understand Gods word and are capable of explaining it well to others. Men of good character. Humble. Good people skills.
- Integrity over time in conducting themselves according to biblical principles

Most common responses:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| 1. Godly lifestyle, Above Reproach, Blameless in actions | (40%) |
| 2. Spiritual Maturity, Relationship to God, Heart of God | (33%) |
| 3. Bible Knowledge, Theologically Sound | (24%) |
| 4. Proven, Faithful, Steady over time | (21%) |
| 5. Love, Compassion, Concern for Others | (19%) |
| • Biblical Qualifications, 1 Tim 3, Titus 1 | (19%) |
| 6. Honesty, Integrity, Trustworthiness | (19%) |
| 7. Leadership ability | (18%) |
| 8. Servanthood, active and involved in ministry | (16%) |
| 9. Godly household, family life | (13%) |
| 10. Wisdom, Discernment, Decision-making ability | (12%) |

Q14. Do you feel the right men were selected? What would you have done differently?

96% Responded

97% said yes, the right men were selected

Comments on doing it differently:

- Yes... Would like more :)
- All the men selected are fine. I think we are not using the abilities of some of our senior men.
- not sure I knew these as well as I should to nominate for such an office
- yes, but our elders need to be more visible / vocal
- Yes, as much as I know these men. However, I do not know all of them personally
- I don't know who they are

Q15. Have all of the elders been visible enough? Who is currently serving as an elder?

87% responded

69% said visible enough

12% are unsure

19% said not visible enough

In attempting to name all of the elders:

17% named all elders

15% named elders, not pastor

22% named only lay elders

11% named 1-2 elders

22% named at least one non-elder

13% said they don't know

Q16. Is there anything in FBC's history that you think affected this change?
79% responded

71% said no or that they didn't know

- I was surprised how easily it was accepted quite honestly. Based on past history.
- seeing the need to become more like the New Testament Church
- The fact that we were a relatively small congregation with trusted men already in leadership positions made the transition easy.
- Direction of the church to a younger congregation
- Possibly the fact that certain individuals have had control over areas for a long time made the transition easier in the sense that people could see that this change was necessary.
- Great question... I don't know... I think in general the church trusted the deacons and the pastors and even if they didn't fully understand or see the need they trusted they wouldn't be lead astray.
- Our Pastor brought forth the idea
- A congregation willing to trust its leadership after proper presentation and a desire to be what God would have the local church to be.
- It has smoothed over the process of what needs voted on and what doesn't.
- our new pastor leading us to look at a more biblical view for our church.
- no, biblical teaching
- no - biblical teaching
- I think our pastors have often even sought ideas and advice from former pastors still attending our church and perhaps realized having elders was worthwhile.
- In the past, the congregation has been a major strong voice in all business and admin activities.
- If we go back to 8 to 10 years ago, I would say yes. There was so much discord - divisions. We probably would have been better served to have elders back then but the church wouldn't have been open to it.
- Consistent smooth transitions/changes
- I think the deacons were many times looked up to as what we now know are elders.

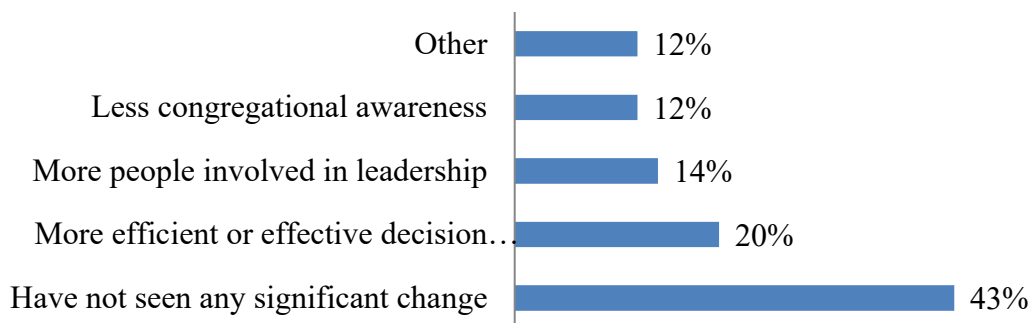
Q17. What would you say has changed the most since making the decision to be an elder-led church?

68% Responded

- I like that things go through the Elders first before being brought to the congregation. The tension that used to be felt at business meetings is no longer there (also a positive change going to Membership meetings) and people seem to respect if an issue has come from the Elders that needs attention. People or a Pastor are no longer able to just bring their own agendas to the congregation.
- the role of the pastor to more transparency
- Haven't noticed any change.
- It seems as though there is more leadership involvement, and it does not solely lie on our Pastor's shoulders.
- Most people have probably not noticed a change unless they are involved in a ministry or leadership role in the church. I feel with the elders making the day to day decisions and the congregation making major decisions alongside the elders, it makes the church work more effectively.
- A smoother way of overseeing needs of the congregation.
- Pastor Josh has others to fill in and the congregation gets a little different style of teaching.
- I can see no difference.
- None
- Minor decisions can be handled in a timely fashion for immediate needs
- Having less of an issue of certain people controlling certain things because they have for too many years.
- I know less about what is going on. Membership meetings I believe are an attempt to keep people informed. If you are not involved in an area you don't know what is happening. Church feels more segregated.
- Church business and business meetings.
- The transition was smooth and came about almost un-noticed, at least for this church member.
- Hopefully, our pastor doesn't carry as much of the load, but I'm not sure that's the case. I think our elders (speaking of myself) could do more in this aspect.
- Easier decision making
- Congregants not as aware of issues and process of the workings in the church
- Change is slow from historical emphasis on single pastor leadership concept.
- I'm not needed to make most decisions. I have less interest in church government.
- It has smoothed over the process of what needs voted on and what doesn't.
- From my perspective at my level of involvement within the church, I have not observed a significant shift in operation of the church since the change.
- Scripture has been clarified, I am more aware of the distinction of a deacon vs elder.
- Nothing really outwardly, but behind the scenes I'm sure things are different.
- don't know
- nothing that I know of
- music

- nothing
- I feel we are left out of the loop. we have lost our deacon board as such
- Not aware of any outward changes
- Not sure that I've seen outward changes
- I really haven't seen any change since we came just as the transition was coming about.
- not much
- nothing
- not knowing what decisions are being made.
- I honestly do not see any change
- not sure, maybe decisions made by a group
- haven't seen any change
- less bickering on small items. too many cooks spoil the soup.
- More unity than in our previous churches
- Nothing
- I do [not] see any changes. We have a wonderful church either way.
- Morning worship music
- Nothing
- Possibly with more men working together to lead our church, there is less stress on the pastor and deacons.
- Less congregational involvement in business and administration activities
- More decisions made albeit few are being made by elders
- Honestly, I do not personally see much change - everything still goes along smoothly
- Less visibility from deacons
- Don't see a change really
- Meetings are smoother because decisions have been made that didn't need to go before the church
- I can't say that I have seen any changes. But, while I do attend regularly, I am not very involved in the workings of the church.
- Titles
- as a member of the congregation, not much at all. as a trustee, many of our responsibilities are performed by the elders.

Most common answers:



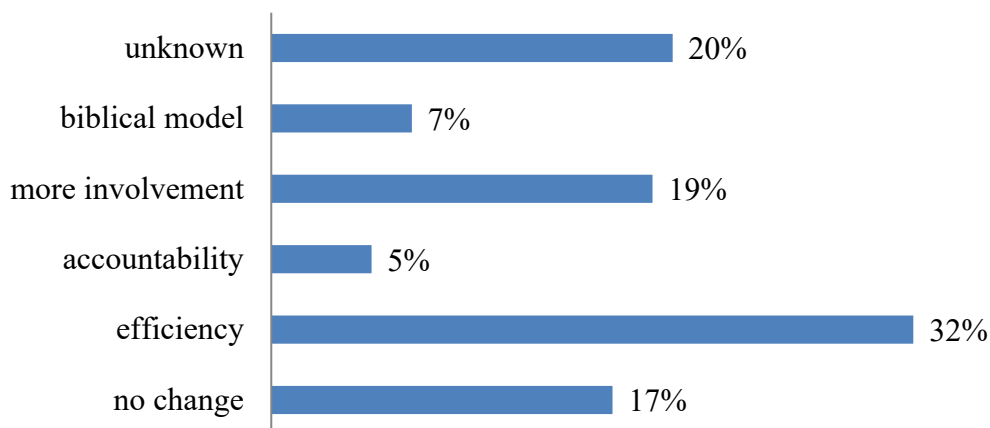
Q18. In your opinion, what have been the biggest advantages in changing to an elder-led church?

79% responded

- I like having a few trusted representatives who are active and involved in the church making some of the decisions rather than a few members some of whom are not really even involved making important church decisions. Keeps from a click forming or a Pastor who may want to make their own changes not what is best for the body. -Not really sure how to say that.....
- as stated above transparency, more desire for God's wisdom which is found through the counsel of those who seek God's heart
- Larger outreach of leadership.
- The advantage is in having strong leadership making decisions so that everything doesn't have to be brought back to the church. The elders have been wise enough to inform the congregation of decisions that affect the church body so we don't feel left out.
- Not so many committees to work through when meeting needs of church
- Different elders helps Pastor Josh to receive the word of the Lord and take care of many other needs of the Church.
- Removed minor business from meetings to allow for greater discussion on important issues
- Keeping things simple. No ugly business meetings where people are arguing about stupid things.
- Better leadership.
- It is outlined in Scripture
- Larger group of people to help with decisions that affect the church. There's wisdom in a multitude of council.
- Ease in decision making
- Decisions can be made quicker, issues address in a more timely manner
- Correct Biblical structure and greater emphasis on shared ministry.
- More Pastoral Accountability, better process of voting/less committees.
- I cannot explain the link, but oddly enough it is my opinion that there has been more involvement from the body of the church.
- I don't really see any outward changes or advantages other than the elder role and deacon role being more clearly defined.
- quicker decisions
- Our church is more aware of how the earlier churches in the Bible would have been led.
- Our focus, accountability, feels safer. I've seen too many churches where the pastor comes in and takes over! and no one stops him! It's terribly sad! EVERYONE needs to be accountable.
- Spiritual matters and decisions are addressed and made by those considered to be the most mature in the faith and not by a single person (pastor) or democratic vote (congregational).
- I see more concern for others.
- I am not as involved and have less on my servant plate.

- take some of the load off pastors
- not sure, do not keep up with the business end. I have always felt that I could express concerns to who I believe to be elders in the church
- don't understand the advantages
- less meetings
- leadership is able to work without being encumbered
- There is more ppl to help the pastor, who is great.
- I haven't noticed that much of a change. To be honest I just come to worship the Lord with like-minded people, fellowship, and try to be of use to Him.
- someone is always available to pray with, give advice
- Someone is always available to pray with, give advice
- More men to help those in need and make decisions for our church.
- Improved business and admin efficiency
- Streamlines decision making process
- Some things can be addressed and dealt with more quickly
- Do not have to wait on a congregational meeting to move forward with an agenda item
- I'm not sure how to answer this one. I think, in theory, you should have more accountability among the leadership of the church, also the responsibility of leadership no longer weighs on one man. And as I understand it there are some things that the Elders can decide on without the input of the congregation. Having been on a church committee in the past I can see this being a more expedient way of making decisions. I'm not sure that really covers the breadth of the role of an Elder though.
- Alignment with the new testament church
- The leadership of the church is not placed upon one man (pastor) but many men, with the same goal to glorify Christ and carry the weight together.
- streamlined decision making done by capable God-led men

Most common answers:



Q19. In your opinion, what have been the biggest challenges in changing to an elder-led church?

75% responded

45% said no challenges or weren't sure of any

- probably having the members seeing the role of pastor change to a less single role to a more council lead role, the pastor is not to be the "Lone Ranger"
- I would say getting use to each person's teaching or leadership styles whether it be for church service, leading or teaching a class, leading a meeting, dinner gathering, etc. It can sometimes be a struggle to be open to changes when you like the mannerisms of one of the people over another.
- Convincing the older people it is for the better.
- Probably the biggest challenges would be the added responsibility to those who are elders. I would imagine that these men feel the weight of that responsibility.
- Finding men to serve as deacons yes.
- Congregation is not involved in elder decisions
- Having enough truly Godly men to lead.
- Understanding the new roles
- I guess church leadership might be aware of challenges, but as a church member I don't know if any.
- Me personally feeling sorely inadequate in serving the way I should. Mostly finding the time to do more.
- Selection of board of elders
- Initial presentation; which, was not difficult
- Flow of information
- Transition of congregation understanding of difference between Elders and Deacons
- Challenges would be in the front office.
- Perhaps members complaining they have less "influence" in church decisions
- Likely the initial "shock" of the concept, and then the general management of change. Otherwise I am not aware of any significant challenges or issues.
- Getting used to a few people making all decisions
- Giving up authority to elders
- Church leaders thought about it (hopefully prayed about it), change was presented to church family for a vote but it seems this change is more of a "ho-hum" process with little activity
- time - needs more time
- Communication to get it done, and that was handled well
- Resistance from Deacon fans? idk.
- the men in our church are all great speakers and leaders. I'm sure there are changes, more responsibility maybe.
- The men in the our church are all great speakers and leaders. I'm sure there are changes, more responsibility maybe.
- Initially educating the members of the need for, and role of elders
- Congregational understanding and acceptance

- Being an elder and making decisions that may have been voted on by the congregation previously
- Making for sure the congregation still feels their desires / opinions are being heard. They still feel they have control.
- Simply the essence of change, no notable challenges come to mind
- I haven't had any challenges at all. Biggest challenge will be finding replacements.

Q20. Looking back over the last 2 years since this change, do you think it was a good idea to make the transition to an elder-led church? Why or why not?

84% responded

Yes [positive toward the change]

- Yes, I think for the reasons mentioned above.
- good, as stated above the need to be more of a New Testament church is important for growth and God's blessing
- I do, it gives our church more of an opportunity to reach out to more people in our community because there is more than just one face in our church. Some churches may assume it is always the pastor's duty to represent our church at every community event, which can put a large amount of stress on a pastor. Having an elder-led church allows our Pastor to focus on areas that he truly should be focusing on. This will give them more time to prepare messages for service and really help us all in growing closer to God with our personal relationships with Him, and as a church. This also alleviate sole decision making. It allows more people to take on responsibility and have a say in the decisions for the church while also allowing them to be a minister for God's work.
- I think that for our congregation it was a good idea. I also feel that an elder led church like any other church governing structure is only as good as its leaders. Praying about our choice, studying the Bible references to elders, understanding the change, and having unity in the congregation are all factors in a successful change to an elder led church.
- Yes it's a biblical model which works very differently
- Yes, very confident in these men to make decisions that honor Christ and represent the quality of F.B.C.'s Concern for members, and Relationship with the community it has developed over the years
- Yes; for the simple fact that it reflects the New Testament church.
- Yes. Gives elders more authority.
- Yes, because those in the church that I trust believed it was good.
- Yes. I think again it is a Biblical approach and hopefully will help others realize that just as the elders are just other members of they body, they too have a purpose in the church.
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes, structure, but I have not noticed a difference in anything
- Probably
- Yes - Biblical authenticity and growth for congregation in expanded ministry service.
- Yes
- A good idea - yes. If for no other reason I think the process was good for the church. Managing changes and accepting, encouraging and developing men to lead from within the church is never a bad thing.
- Yes, it's more biblical
- Yes. FBC has a strong administration. The selected elders are and have always been respectable leaders of our church.

- Yes
- yes
- Yes. Standing still is not good.
- Sure
- Yes; because our church will continue to be led by men wanting the best for our church.
- Yes, it's biblical and needs to take place in every church
- Absolutely. It creates accountability among church leaders as a group.
- Yes it's been good
- I like F.B.C. and what it stands for, so I would say the transition is successful.
- good
- yes, things run more smoothly
- Yes. Anytime a new leader is put in place some change occurs. I think it's that idea of continuous improvement in effect, which is a good thing. It shows initiative.
- Yes
- Yes. It is biblical. The larger a church (more members), the more people to take responsibility. Someone is always there to talk with, pray with.
- Yes. It is biblical. The larger a church (more members), the more people to take responsibility. Someone is always there to talk with, pray with.
- Yes, seems to be working out well
- Yes - same as above
- yes... streamlined decision making process
- Yes - It has been a smooth seamless transition. If it helps the pastor, it helps us all.
- It seems good the church is sustaining or even growing
- Yes , again just a stream lined process. The more people involved in decision making sometimes leads to conflict, where as if a decision was made and then reported, people trust the Elders to do what is right
- Again, I think the change has been good.
- Yes, smooth transition to align with scripture
- Yes
- Yes I do. I have no problem looking up to any of the elders for advice, leadership, and decision making. I never felt that way with every deacon.

Unsure but interested [positive toward the change]

- It is probably less stressful for the Pastor
- it's fine with me.

Unsure [neutral toward the change]

- I'm not sure.
- I have not really seen a big difference.
- If i was more involved I would probably have an answer. I trust the decisions of our leaders who had prayed about the change.
- to me it's the same
- I don't attend as much so I can't say one way or another
- I don't see any noticeable effects

- I honestly have not noticed any difference from 2 years ago to now, but maybe I just am not aware.
- I don't see a change. I'm not involved in administration, so don't see what happens on that level.
- the same
- It's the same to me
- I have no real opinion on the elder leadership topic
- I'm unsure, this is not something that I see or hear much about

Unsure but doubtful [negative toward the change]

- Don't know since I choose not to get involved.
- I think it is working well under our present pastor. I can see it not working well under a domineering pastor.

No [negative toward the change]

- No, see answer to the biggest change. ("I know less about what is going on.")
- I still don't see the need for this change

Most common reasons to be positive toward the transition:

1. There is more participation in church leadership.
2. It is a biblical model of church government.
3. There is trust of the leadership and the men selected as elders.
4. Decisions are made more efficiently.

Most common reasons to be indifferent or negative toward the transition:

1. There is less awareness of what decisions are being made.
2. There is a lack of understanding of the new roles.
3. People worry about leadership in the future under this model.

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE CHANGE
(2 yrs after transition)

	<u>Positive</u>	<u>Neutral</u>	<u>Negative</u>
OVERALL	63%	15%	5%
Men	74%	11%	4%
Women	56%	17%	6%
GENERATION ⁵			
Millennials	88%	13%	0%
Gen-X	83%	11%	0%
Baby Boomer	63%	15%	4%
Traditionals	36%	18%	14%
HISTORY			
New	76%	12%	0%
3-11 years	50%	40%	10%
12-19 years	63%	25%	0%
20+ years	40%	0%	10%
> 50% of life	71%	5%	10%
INVOLVEMENT ⁶			
Leader	90%	0%	10%
Active Member	88%	0%	6%
Regular Member	49%	24%	5%
AWARENESS			
Very Aware and Involved	81%	7%	7%
Aware, Not Very Involved	63%	17%	3%
Somewhat Aware	50%	30%	10%
Not Aware or Involved	13%	13%	0%

⁵ This category appears to be statistically significant skewed toward some disapproval of the older generation but p-value was 0.195 on a chi-squared test. This is most likely due to the low response rate on this question from the “traditionals” generation of just 68%. If all non-responses are treated as neutral responses, the p-value becomes .0382. Therefore, this difference is treated as significant in the report.

⁶ This category was shown to be statistically significant with a chi-squared test p-value of 0.0407. It is skewed toward the positive response of those who were leaders and active members versus the more neutral response of those who were less active in the church.

Q21. Is there anything about how the elders function right now that you would like to see change?

71% responded

68% said no or not sure

- Maybe just more visibility
- more accountability not only personally, but for seeing that members are accountable for their lifestyle also
- Years ago when you became a member you were assigned to a deacon as a contact if needed.
- For those in the congregation who might not know the elders, it might be good to have the names listed in the bulletin or in the information center.
- Not involved in decisions made by elders/pastor unless it comes to a membership vote.
- Confront sin when needed.
- Would like to have more and I personally wish I had more time to serve.
- I know there are some things that can't be made public, but I would suggest that minutes be taken at the Elders meetings, and for the most part, general non-sensitive issues, those minutes be made public. Possibly by posting on Church website where anyone wishing to may follow what is going on within church government.
- It will come with time as current Elders become more comfortable in roles and responsibilities for leadership and growth in discipleship. Creating within the congregation opportunities for service and spiritual growth.
- decision documentation
- I would like to see deacons operate as deacons, serving the needs of the church and the elders operate as more of plurality.
- no change... maybe some more people taking part of music specials
- Be more visible. I really don't know what our elders or deacons do.
- Not sure on exactly what their functions include
- If you want them to be more visible, anytime they address the congregation, ask them to include the fact that they are an elder in their introduction. (or even simpler, but probably controversial, give them all "E's" to pin to their lapel.)
- I would like to see who they all are and who the deacons are. This is probably my fault for not attending membership meetings regularly.
- Clearer understanding/ more transparent of the current roles/actions

Most common answers:

- Elders need to be more visible
- Roles need better defined and/or publicized (including deacons)
- Document and publicize decisions that the elders have made
- Accountability and church discipline for the congregation

Q22. Is there anything else about this change in church government that you would like to note?

65% responded

65% simply said no

- I felt based on Leadership's explanations of why this was important, from my perspective it felt like a very smooth transition.
- I know that I am not the most involved person, and I am really trying to step out and change that. But I will say at the events that I have been able to attend, I have seen the elders and they are being involved. Whether it be at the Loving Heart Soul Food dinner, VBS, morning announcements, or downstairs in the classrooms, their presence can be spotted and I think that is wonderful knowing that they are leaders in our church and have that stress on them, but yet still make time to help out in other areas. I really do love this church and the community involvement it projects!
- I am pleased how well it has been received and how well the style is functioning. Indicates the right men were chosen and the congregation has a heart to follow this Biblical model
- Anytime you make the decision to do as scripture models, the right decision has been made even if it is a painful change.
- It was handled properly from its inception. There was no hostility to the change as the topic was correctly presented and supported in humility with servant leadership being the dominant model .
- Would like to see updated constitution and by-laws readily available. Also would like to see minutes of business meetings readily available without going thru church office with request. I might become more interested based on the minutes or I might choose not to. Noted, I could probably get minutes if I attended meetings.
- I have appreciated the openness and opportunities for discussion that were made available to the body.
- I misunderstood the transition to an elder lead church initially at the beginning of this survey. I thought the transition was about clarifying the roles of deacons and elders, but after discussing this survey with Barry, I understand the change was really from a congregation lead church to an elder lead church (a more biblical model). So by completing this survey it has helped me better understand the process we are going through on an even deeper level.
- Just don't change the messages we have been given. I have really enjoyed church in the morning.
- no. I think it is working as designed by God.
- no just conform to the covenant
- I didn't see that it is better and has the possibility of being dictatorial
- Maybe each month, highlight an elder/spouse/family in weekly bulletin. Also, deacon/spouse/family.
- If nothing else, this questionnaire has made me aware of my lack of participation in church activities over the last 2 years. :-(

- We need to promote and encourage visitation by elders and deacons, especially to the seniors.
- I believe because we have a healthy church, the change went well. We trust our pastor and we trust our leaders. I'm not sure an unhealthy church could make this kind of transition.
- More clear understanding of how the role of deacon has changed

APPENDIX 4

MEMBER INTERVIEW SELECTION

Criteria for overall selection:

- Individuals willing and available to participate
- Individuals involved enough in the church and in the transition
- Individuals insightful and articulate enough to voice opinions
- Males and females represented proportionally to the congregation
- All of the generations represented
- Differing viewpoints (based on their survey) represented

Members selected:

- **Betty Bloss**, 87 year old female, had attended FBC for 45 years, involved in numerous ministries over her time at First Baptist, still involved in the kitchen ministry and VBS, always straight forward and opinionated in a kind way, represented the typical “traditional” viewpoint on her survey
- **Ernie Bowman**, 87 year old male, had attended FBC for 62 years, involved in almost everything over the life of the church, deacon for more than 60 years, very supportive but never afraid to speak his mind, was a top nomination to be an elder but declined, represented the typical “traditional” viewpoint on his survey
- **Jenny LeHew**, 44 year old female, had attended FBC on multiple occasions throughout her life, involved on the facilities committee and in children’s ministry, has had experience at other churches, her survey revealed some unique perspectives and opinions, but still overall representative of the “Gen X” view

- **Jessica Dresbach**, 25 year old female, had attend FBC her entire life, involved in youth ministry and missions, provided very insightful viewpoints on her survey, provided a good representation of the overall “Millennial” viewpoint
- **Matt Hines**, 36 year old male, had attend FBC as a child and then again as an adult with his family, leads children’s church ministry, has been involved in leadership in personal life, was very matter-of-fact on survey
- **Mike MacCrae**, 66 year old male, had just begun attending FBC at the time of the transition, involved in finance committee and teaching, very in-depth biblical and practical knowledge of plural elders, strong advocate for the polity
- **Missy Branham**, 51 year old female, had attended FBC for 18 years, incredible servant leader involved in multiple ministries in the church, usually behind the scenes, provided perspective from someone younger that was typically involved in church business previous to the transition
- **Rick Noel**, 59 year old male, had attended FBC for 12 years, deacon during the transition and involved in the finance committee and music ministry, has experience in multiple other churches, was somewhat critical on his survey and able to articulate some unique viewpoints
- **Ruth Ann Moore**, 64 year old female, had attend FBC for 29 years, volunteer administrative assistant and involved in finance and music, was a pastor’s wife for years and has extensive experience in SBC churches, was typical of the “Baby Boomer” viewpoint on her survey

APPENDIX 5

MEMBER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Church Transition to a Plurality of Elders: A Case Study

Congregational Interview Protocol

Name _____

The following is a semi-structured interview protocol for an interview with select members of the congregation that participated in the survey. Much of this protocol is based on topics that surfaced in the precedent literature and the congregational survey. This research method will highlight the following stages mentioned in Chapter 3, Research Methodology: History, Announcement, Approval, Selection, and Results.

Informed Consent: The research in which you are about to participate is designed to describe our church's transition to elder leadership. This research is being conducted by Josh Remy for purposes of dissertation research. In this research, you will be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church, the transition to elder leadership, and the current state of leadership in our church. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. I will be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please do not let that affect your answers. At any time if you want me to strike something from the record or keep it anonymous, just let me know. Do you understand and agree to participate?

What were your first impressions of the idea for FBC to transition to elder-leadership?

The entire transition of this went very well at our church. Agree? Why do you think that is?

Many people listed trust as one of the reasons they favored the transition. What built that trust? What would have happened if that trust wasn't there?

Many people said that the demonstration of elder leadership from the Bible helped convince them. Were you surprised by the amount of biblical support for this kind of

church government? Do you think it had previously been overlooked or just ignored and seen as irrelevant?

Many struggled to see the difference between Deacons and Elders both biblically and practically. Why do you think that is? Has how this church treated Deacons in the past confused the issue? How can we help clear it up now?

In the past, our congregation was fully democratic... we voted on most things at business meetings. Do you miss anything about that? Do you feel you still have a say in matters?

Our people really believed that all of our elders need to be more visible. How can we do that? Do you like still having someone that we call THE pastor or do you think that hurts the visibility of the other elders?

Overall, do you think this change to elder leadership was good and do you think it was necessary?

Anything else you would like to add? Something you would tell another church considering this change? Would you recommend it for churches like ours?

APPENDIX 6

MEMBER INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

(alphabetical order)

INTERVIEW WITH BETTY

Researcher: Okay. I'm here with Betty Bloss. She is a member of our church and has been for a while. Going to talk about the transition to plurality of elders. Betty. In this research you are about to participate in, it's designed to describe our churches transition to elder leadership and this research is being conducted by Josh Remy for purposes of dissertation research. In it, you will be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church transition to elder leadership and the current state of leadership in our church. Participation in this study is totally voluntary. You're free to withdrawal from the study at any time. I will be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please don't let that affect your answers at any time. If you want me to strike something from the record or keep it anonymous, just let me know. Do you understand and agree to participate?

Betty: Yes.

Researcher: All right, let's roll then. What were your first impressions of the idea for First Baptist church to transition to this thing called elder leadership?

Betty: My first impression was I didn't see the need in it. Um I felt like that the way the leadership was that it was just good, like it was with the Deacon Program.

Researcher: So you saw Deacon's kind of in that role already?

Betty: Yes, I did.

Researcher: Okay. And if it ain't broke, don't fix it - is that pretty much what you're saying?

Betty: Yes.

Researcher: You're not alone in that. There were others that said something very similar. Yeah.

Betty: I came from another denomination as a kid. I grew up in another denomination.

Researcher: What was that? Just out of curiosity.

Betty: Disciples of Christ. And they had elders. My mother was an elder. Okay. So see, I associate that with, with, with another with that, with other denominations.

Researcher: So in general, we can speak to the results later, but the transition itself seemed to go really well. There wasn't a lot of fighting about it or anything like that. Would you agree with that?

Betty: Yes, I do agree with that.

Researcher: Why do you think that was?

Betty: Because of the, the congregation that we have are very able and content to, to go along with the leadership and what they think is best for our church.

Researcher: Okay. We are rather agreeable. When I asked people (on that, that larger survey that I gave) why they favor the transition many of them listed trust as one of the reasons. Something what you alluded to just know that trust was a factor. What do you think builds that trust?

Betty: I just think that it's just a knowing the people that are our leaders are the people that have researched and done the work towards a change. And I just feel like that is just in all and knowledge of knowing. That makes sense.

Researcher: Absolutely. It is. Yes. What do you think? Just a hypothetical question. You remove that trust. So let's say you, you were a little suspicious of me. You were a little suspicious of the constitution committee. You remove that. What do you think happens if we tried to make this change?

Betty: I don't know exactly what you mean.

Researcher: So, so trust seems like it was foundational in this process, so take that trust away. Okay. Do you think this transition would have worked or do you think we would have even got to a vote?

Betty: Probably not.

Researcher: Another thing that came up quite a bit in these surveys, many people said that the demonstration of elder leadership from the Bible helped convince them that this was going to be a good idea. That it was shown from scripture. Were you personally surprised by the amount of biblical support

or had you interacted with that before? Had you seen this in the Bible before?

Betty: I had seen, I had seen that, but that wasn't my thinking. I was really surprised. I honestly didn't know the constitution committee was formed. Okay. Until this came up. I did not know that.

Researcher: Really? You must've missed that particular meeting day. Yeah.

Betty: Well, no, that okay. And so I was a little taken by surprise. Okay. Because of that. But then when I, so the committee and the way they'd worked and everything, then, you know, I didn't have any problem with what their work was. I just didn't see the need of changing.

Researcher: Yeah. Oh yeah, totally get that. Well, why do you think SBC churches in general, but specifically our church has ignored this kind of leadership in the past?

Betty: I don't know. It's never come up.

Researcher: One of the issues that came up on the survey as well, and it's something you've already alluded to is the difference between deacons and elders. A lot of people just said, I just didn't see a difference and so I didn't see you with what the need was. Why do you think there is a confusion between the biblical roles of deacons and elders?

Betty: Well, always considered the elder position as probably the pastor. The deacons had their role in the church as and as leaders. I thought of course we were involved with the Deacon Program for years ourselves. So I didn't feel like there was the difference. There was so different. You know, we have a deacon program that interacts with the congregation. And then the elder, the way I considered it more or less, I mean not had to blank out the past to the nomination. You know, as when I read the Bible, I as the leader as the pastor.

Researcher: Okay, so you saw a model more that it was a single elder who had deacons helping him.

Betty: Right.

Researcher: Um in the past, and this is something you alluded to in your survey that was a bit of a struggle for you. Part of why I picked to interview you. Our congregation was fully democratic. We voted on just about everything. Do you miss anything about that? Personally, do you miss us voting on most if not all things.

Betty: Yes, I do. I do miss that.

Researcher: What would you say that you miss about that?

Betty: Well, it's kind of difficult because I feel like with our people, a lot of them have opinions that they won't express out, like, you know, not negative, but maybe oppose something, but they won't raise their hand or something, you know, to, to, to say that. But they will say to you privately or, or they would talk to their deacons or something, but they didn't want to be, seem to be the outcast or the lone dissenter or something, you know? And so always missed it because I felt like if they did the, the the ballots on, on major programs or problems, then that way they would get the true feeling of the congregation.

Researcher: You get more honesty.

Betty: Yeah, because like I, I know a lot of people that won't, won't raise their hand when they are, when I definitely don't agree, but they don't want to be dissenters. It's like me, there's a lot of times I wouldn't do this because I didn't want to do that, you know? I didn't, I didn't want to be no Jane, you know? So there's a lot of them over there like that. They're just good people that don't want dissension. Don't rock the boat.

Researcher: Do you as a member of our congregation that has now gone to elder leadership, do you feel like you still have a say in matters?

Betty: Not really, no. I just feel like we're kind of out of the loop. I think. I feel like the senior group is all out of the loop.

Researcher: Well what's interesting, and if you don't mind chasing that a little... As I broke the survey into different generations, it is more your generation that feels out of the loop now that they just don't feel like we have a part like we used to. Whereas in business meetings we'd vote for everything. We feel like we have a part. Why do you think that's just true of that generation? Is it because of that?

Betty: Well, I think it's because that generation is over there now. Of course there are a few new ones are people that have been there a good while and they've always felt a part of making decisions and, and so forth. And now is more youth oriented. It's more towards the, the younger of things. And it's like the senior group is, is the monetary support group but not vocally. You see what I'm saying? You know, I, that's the way I feel and I have expressed that if to talking to somebody over there, a reason when you just felt like the senior group was kind of left out and, and like... He's like and no, I don't mean me. I don't mean I need to be involved because I do exactly what I'm doing. Do exactly what I'm doing. But I just felt like there's a lot of good seniors over there that have a good brains. You know, Chelsey Kelley is extremely bright. Joe Malargio, you know, there's just different ones of men. Now I'm more for the men leadership. Okay. I don't

believe that women have certain roles in Church. But I just feel like the senior loop is, not that we're ignored. It's just we're not included.

Researcher: Do you think elder leadership is what changed that? Or do you think that would have probably happened in anyway just with a younger pastor?

Betty: No, I think it was the elders.

Researcher: It was something about that switch changed things for you?

Betty: Sort of. Okay. I can't really pinpoint it at that, but I think so. No, I don't think your age has thing to do with it.

Researcher: So there was something about congregationalism, full democratic congregationalism that kept even the seniors involved in the life of the church.

Betty: Yeah. Basically as you look at it too, the years it's, it's the seniors that keep it afloat. Okay. These people feel like that they should be included as to thinking, not necessarily being an involved, but it's the thinking of, of, of what's going to happen. I'm not, I don't want to be negative cause I don't, I don't have any personal things towards any of this. It's just the way I feel like it is.

Researcher: Ah, another thing that came up on the survey was people believed that our elders aren't necessarily as visible as they could be. How can we make them more visible? So Gary Cooper, Gary Towler, Barry,

Betty: Well, I think they're all very visible. Did I put down that they weren't?

Researcher: I don't think you did, but the general consensus was that they weren't. And what I found in the older crowd, they all think they are and I think it's because you guys know them. You know, you know these, these people.

Betty: Yeah.

Researcher: Uh one of the things we did, however, we still have somebody that we call the pastor. Are you okay with that or do you think it hurts the visibility of other elders? Do you know what I'm saying? We could have smoothed out all of it so that there was no pastor. We just had elders.

Betty: No, no. We need a pastor.

Researcher: Need a pastor and in your mind, you need a pastor.

Betty: We need a leader. We need a pastor.

Researcher: Overall and again, I want you to answer honestly, do you think this change to elder leadership was number one good and number two, was it necessary?

Betty: Well, it seems to be working here. I did not see for where it was necessary.

Researcher: Okay. That's almost exactly how I thought you would answer. Yeah. Based on how you filled out your survey. And that's fine. I get it. Is there anything else you'd like to add? If there was another church that was considering this move, is there something you would tell them?

Betty: No, I wouldn't interfere.

INTERVIEW WITH ERNIE

Researcher: Okay. I'm here with Ernie Bowman and he's been at First Baptist for a very long time and I want to talk to him about our transition to plurality of elders. I've got to read this to you first, Ernie. The research in which you're about to participate is designed to describe our churches transition to elder leadership. This research is being conducted by Josh Remy for purposes of dissertation research. In it, you will be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church transition to elder leadership in the current state of leadership in our church. Participation in this is totally voluntary. You're free to withdrawal at any time. I am recording for the purpose of transcription. Please don't let that affect your answer at any time. If you want me to strike something from the record or make something anonymous, just let me know. Do you understand and agree to participate?

Ernie: I do.

Researcher: Excellent. What were your first impressions of the idea for First Baptist to transition to elder leadership?

Ernie: I wondered why we needed it.

Researcher: Can you expand on that a little bit? Just cause you thought things were working okay here or we had never done it that way.

Ernie: I had never been in a church that had elder leadership. I'd always been in a congregational led church. I felt First Baptist was doing very well under the present type of leadership. So being unfamiliar with elder leadership, I, I just, why are we doing this?

Researcher: Okay. Uh I think we can kind of agree that the transition seems to go very well when we can talk about the results later. But the transition itself seemed to go well. Do you agree?

Ernie: I think it went very well.

Researcher: Can you speak to why that may have been, why that seemed to go somewhat smoothly?

Ernie: I think basically was because of the pastor we had at the time. Everybody respected him, knew him from childhood felt that he would never do anything that he did not think was best for the church. And biblically he explained that elders were mentioned much more as leaders than our present leadership. And I just, I didn't see any flags at all at that time and I don't see any flags now really in our present leadership.

Researcher: You brought up a trust there. A trust of the pastor was a big one. Trust of the constitution committee. A trust of even the deacons who all seem to have a say in this. What do you think builds that trust?

Ernie: I think trust comes from seeing a person in action listening to them. How they resolve a situations. Uh just their attitude, their demeanor slow to anger. I think people's personalities help build that trust. The more you know about a person, the more you either trust him or don't trust them. Relationship.

Researcher: What I want you to imagine a scenario where that trust wasn't there. How do you think this transition goes at our church? If there was not trust, how that transition go?

Ernie: It would have probably been what if there wasn't trust there? Probably. Oh, well I'd mention "what's in it for me" kind of thoughts. What are we doing wrong that they think we need to make? Someone thinks we need to make this change.

Researcher: One of the things that came up on the survey, again, probably more than any other, it was right there with, with trust was that it was demonstrated from the Bible that that was shown. A lot of people said it would, they felt like it was shown that it was demonstrated throughout scripture. Were you personally surprised by the amount of biblical support for this kind of church government?

Ernie: I was.

Researcher: Do you think it had been previously overlooked or just ignored and seen as irrelevant because obviously your, you know, your Bible and most of our people here do, do you think it just was seen as irrelevant or it was just overlooked?

Ernie: I think probably a little of both. I think it was overlooked because of the fact that the church operated well in my opinion. Under congregational. Yeah, absolutely.

Researcher: So if it ain't broke, don't fix it. Is that basically the thought you think?

Ernie: I think that is, that is a very good solution to your problems, not to problems but, to situations.

Researcher: You've been very involved in SBC life too. So I think I, I'd add that to this. Why do you think it's often overlooked in Southern Baptist cultures?

Ernie: I don't know if this is a proper time to make this statement. I think possibly there is a reason for congregational support and I think very

possibly that elder leadership was, has been abused. Oh, there has to be a reason that for a hundred years I'll just use that figure. Churches were in congregational leadership.

Researcher: Yeah. Because we actually see it in, in the past, in the SBC. But then it went away about a hundred years ago to where it was almost all congregational. Right. So you're, you're dead on. Yeah. It just kind of went away. Nobody went back to it. Because we're, we're a Bible denomination. You know, we live in the Bible and yet we seem to overlook it there. Let's let's talk deacons here. Many saw on the survey struggled to see the difference between deacons and elders? Both biblically and practically. Both when we did the transition and honestly, even now. Why do you think that is?

Ernie: I think people in general feel that they've always been under, they've never had elder leadership. So deacons have always been the leaders in the church. All of a sudden now we go to elders and so what's the difference between an elder leading me and a deacon leading me?

Researcher: Okay. Still. Yeah. So the roles the same in their mind. Just the titles different.

Ernie: I think it, yes. I think that is an accurate statement.

Researcher: Do you think how a SBC churches in general in this church specifically if treated deacons in the past to help to confuse that issue a little?

Ernie: I, I don't think people understand what the difference between an elder deacon because always before it's been pastor, Deacon, congregation, now it's elders, deacon, congregation. I don't even know exactly what that looks like.

Researcher: How do you think we can help clear that up?

Ernie: I don't, I don't know. We have our second Sunday meetings. In other words, I personally miss a business meeting. That's a personal thing. The only time that our people get together for specific information. Second Sunday gathering.

Researcher: And so you don't think the membership meetings have replaced that very well for business meetings?

Ernie: I guess I'm considering a second Sunday...

Researcher: Oh. As a membership. Gotcha. Okay. Okay. I see. But you're right in addressing it there would be good. So in the past, as you've already

alluded to, our congregation was fully democratic. We voted on most things at business meetings. Do you miss anything about that?

Ernie: Absolutely.

Researcher: You do. What do you miss?

Ernie: I miss the people knowing more, being informed about what's going on and having a say in it. There used to be the old saying, one person, one vote. Nobody has any more say than you do.

Researcher: Do you feel like you still have a say in matters?

Ernie: I still have an opinion in matters that my, that the pastor or the elders would listen to. Yes.

Researcher: We still vote on several larger issues. We tried to strike a balance. Do you think we hit a good balance or do you think we're out of balance one direction or the other?

Ernie: I really don't know. I think we're trying very hard to have a good balance. I have no, you know, yeah. Yeah.

Researcher: You wrote something on your survey that I found a very interesting many from your generation and people who have been around in SBC church, they're used to congregational life really were worried about the authority they'd lose a that just what you listed the, the information, the democracy, the back and forth at business meetings. You kind of missed that and yet you wrote something on your survey that I thought was interesting. You feel out of the loop but you feel a little free to serve. Is that accurate? I can read it back to you if you'd like. Said I'm not as involved and have less on my service plate. I pictured that as now you have more time to go work with people, but maybe I read into that... Judging by your face. I'm thinking I read into that.

Ernie: No. Right now, less is re... The church or the leadership is requiring less of me than they used to.

Researcher: Right, right. And is that a good thing to you or a bad thing, I guess is what I'm asking. I read that as a good thing, but now I'm seeing from your expression that it might've been a bad thing.

Ernie: It is a good thing, but I like to know what's going on.

Researcher: Okay. I think I, I think I see where you're coming from in that balance then.

Ernie: In other words, I chose not to be an elder.

Researcher: Right. Which is a question that's coming.

Ernie: I chose that. But I don't like it personally. I don't know what's okay. Yeah.

Researcher: You, you like to know what's going on.

Ernie: Yeah. I've known since, since 1956, I've been a deacon at this church. I have been in the inner circle. Now I'm not, and it's hard and I chose not to be.

Researcher: Yeah. well, since you brought it up, I mean, I had that down to ask you, why did you turn down the nomination? Why did you not want to pursue eldership?

Ernie: Basically I think I know how to be a deacon and I'm not sure at my age, in my background that I would, would really be a good elder looking to the future. I don't want to be a thorn in the flesh.

Researcher: So almost it was a too late kind of thing for you. Well, let me say it this way. 30 years ago, same opportunity arises. Do you take it?

Ernie: I take it.

Researcher: You take it. Okay. That's what I thought, but I wasn't sure.

Ernie: Yeah.

Researcher: One of the things that came up are people believe that our elders need to be more visible. How do you think we could do that?

Ernie: I'm not sure that our elders need to be more visible.

Researcher: Oh, you're, you would disagree with that statement. Okay.

Ernie: In this respect, I don't think we need to have our elders filling the pulpit. I think our elders are visible in the fact that they're at prayer meetings. They lead different things. They are the lead... They are leaders in our church. Every one of them. I don't think that elders need to be any more visible than I as a Deacon am visible.

Researcher: Interesting. Okay. Do you like still having someone that we call the pastor and, or do you think that hurts the, this visibility issue, this balance issue? Do you like still having that point person and someone you refer to as your pastor? Or do you think that's a bad thing?

Ernie: I'm a hundred percent my pastor.

Researcher: Okay. You like having an individual that's called the pastor

Ernie: Absolutely.

Researcher: Okay.

Ernie: That's why we hire him. That's why we called him not hired. That's why we called... Calling is good.

Researcher: Okay. So a couple of just wrap up questions. Overall, do you think this change to elder leadership was good and that it was necessary?

Ernie: I don't think it's any better now than it was and I don't think it was unnecessary.

Researcher: So you're a completely neutral... It didn't need to happen, but it didn't hurt anything.

Ernie: Right. Okay. I'm concerned about the future.

Researcher: Well that's one of the questions I wanted to ask you was you also had commented on your, your form, your survey that you would worry with a different personality of pastor, that this would be, this could actually be harmful. Can you expand on that?

Ernie: Sure. Every pastor that comes, comes because we called him to lead the church under elder leadership. It appears to me that the pastor along that we call him along with the elders, we elect our leaders in the church. Correct? No? Every pastor, I don't care who he is, has his following, has his people that are 100% for him. And I have seen pastors that if we would've had elder leadership, they would have had their way.

Researcher: So in that way you think that elder leadership actually would have made, made that worse than congregational leadership. The congregation wouldn't have stopped it?

Ernie: I don't know if they could have stopped.

Researcher: No, I'm saying, let's say it was congregational instead of elders. And that same pastor came in - that same domineering pastor. One of the, one of the benefits that a lot of people say about elder leadership is that you have a buffer. You have accountability for that pastor, but I hear you saying that you'd be, you'd fear the opposite.

Ernie: I fear that the pastor has his, has the elders on his side for whatever he wants and they just, and he runs. He can, he becomes a dictator. Yeah. Okay. And I'm not sure that's why churches did not go away from elder back to congregation. I don't know the history.

Researcher: It is interesting that you point that out because so many people do point that as the opposite that it protects from that because you've got a small group of men that know what's going on and can stop that sort of thing. But it's interesting to see that you think it might be the good old boy system where he rallies them around. Is there, is there something you think we can do to prevent that? I mean the, the elders are elected by the congregation, but you don't think that's enough.

Ernie: Who knows?

Researcher: Interesting viewpoint. Good. Anything else that you'd like to add? Is there something you'd tell another church considering this change?

Ernie: I like to know why churches went away from elder leadership into congregational leadership.

Researcher: That can be a fun study. Alright. Anything else?

Ernie: No.

Researcher: Thank you so much, Ernie. Appreciated greatly.

INTERVIEW WITH JENNY

Researcher: Alright. I'm here with Jenny LeHew, member of First Baptist. We're going to be talking about our transition to plurality of elders. Alright Jenny, I've got to read this for you. The research in which you're about to participate is designed to describe our churches transition to elder leadership. This research is being conducted by Joshua Remy for purposes of dissertation research in it, you'll be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church, transitioned to elder leadership and the current state of leadership in our church. Participation in the study is totally voluntary and you're free withdrawal from the study at any time. I will be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please do not let that affect your answers at any time. If you want me to strike something from the record or keep it anonymous, just let me know. Do you understand and agree to participate?

Jenny: Yes

Researcher: And the other thing I didn't say before was pretend that it's not me. Pretend it's a, a detached researcher. Okay. So if you need to say something critical, please, you will not hurt my feelings. First question then, what were your first impressions of the idea for First Baptist to transition to elder leadership?

Jenny: I thought it was absolutely right on. That's what we should do.

Researcher: So no worries initially at all. You thought it was a good, good move?

Jenny: Yeah. It's biblical.

Researcher: Because it was biblical. Had you had interaction with elder leadership before at a previous church?

Jenny: Yes.

Researcher: Where at

Jenny: Sunshine Ministries in Florida

Researcher: And they had a, they had plural elders.

Jenny: Yes.

Researcher: We'll talk kind of about the results later. But it's been the general consensus that the transition itself, the announcement and the vote and all of that went pretty well at our church. Would you agree?

Jenny: I would agree.

Researcher: Why do you think that was?

Jenny: I think it was because... I think people have a general trust in our leadership was what I think. I think it really is about that. It might've been about the fact that they were tired of business meetings.

Researcher: It's possible... Tired of business meetings. It's funny that you mentioned trust. I'd say more than, than anything on the survey trust showed up is one of the reasons people favor the transition. They either as trusted the pastor or trust of the constitution committee trust of just the deacons that were seen to be in favor of it. What do you think builds that kind of trust that allows people to to say, okay, yeah, I can go along with this

Jenny: Time.

Researcher: Expand on that. What kind of time.

Jenny: Many in our church had been around for years and years and have served with, you know, each other for years. But I think in certain populations it might mean that they just don't care so whoever wants to do it can go ahead and do it. And I think for those who really do care, it's, it's, you know, it's because they've seen the service and they've seen what people have done and you know, there's a certain amount of trust there.

Researcher: I want you to imagine a hypothetical for me. If that trust wasn't there, do you think our church could have moved through this kind of transition or not?

Jenny: Well, I think it did because I mean, I might not be fully on board with all of the choices. But in general, I think it still would have moved forward because I think there's enough in there, even if you have questions or you think certain people are questionable. I think overall most people have trust with most of who's in leadership.

Researcher: Another thing that came up in the survey, so many people said the demonstration of elder leadership from the Bible helped to convince them. It sounds like you had had that happen to you previously. So you weren't surprised at the amount of biblical support for this kind of government. Um why do you think some people were?

Jenny: Because they don't take time enough to know what the Bible says to begin with. I guess really what boils down to you go with what traditions and you don't search it out yourself. .

Researcher: Do you think in the history of our church specifically, but I'd say even Southern Baptist world generally, do you think this has been overlooked this, this type of leadership or do you think it's just been ignored and seen as irrelevant?

Jenny: It's probably both, but I would almost tend to almost go, it might've just been ignored.

Researcher: Seen as, as not really required by scripture.

Jenny: Sure. Yeah. Cause I've certainly, you know, the years we've been Baptist all my life, but never been a push for elders anywhere until more of late. And I don't know if that's because change has happened in Southern Baptist, you know, convention part or what, but you know, that was kind of almost seen as taboo years ago. You don't really want to, you don't want to go that route. Like why?

Researcher: What do you think? Ah, that's interesting that you bring that up. Do you get, can you know why that's changed? Do you think you just...

Jenny: I have no idea. I'm hoping that there's just a more of personal revival going on with individuals to say, you know, let's, let's forget about what tradition has been. This is what the Bible says. We need to move towards this. That's what I hope. I hope, you know, because there are several areas I've seen a change in, in this. I think this is being just kind of one of them and I don't know if it's convention wide, but I think it's more, there's something there. I think so.

Researcher: One of the issues that a lot of people seem to have was a struggle to see the difference between deacons and elders both biblically and practically. Why, why do you think that confusion existed in our church or, or even other Southern Baptist churches for that matter?

Jenny: I think, I think it's just about years in the title. You know, deacons always did all this, you know, whatever they were assigned to do. I don't, I don't know why there would be confusion based on biblical analysis because it's kind of pretty black and white as dealing with the roles are kind of different. But I think they're, they're wrapping their mind around the roles of deacons have changed a bit, but so maybe they think, you know, maybe it's, it was wrapped up in, while the deacons used to have more of a say. I don't know if that would be okay, but it's just basically,

Researcher: Do you think how our church has treated deacons in the past has confused the issue,

Jenny: Treated them? I don't know if it's so much as treatment is, it's just tradition I think.

Researcher: I guess that's what I mean. Yeah. I think how they looked at deacons, how they saw deacons.

Jenny: I think, you know, as with many things have happened, it's been about, status. It's, yeah, it's blurred the lines and what should've never been anyway.

Researcher: In the past, our church, along with many Southern Baptist churches, was, I guess we'd describe it as fully democratic, that we voted on a whole lot of things in business meetings. Most things, let's say. Do you miss anything about that kind of government?

Jenny: No, not a thing.

Researcher: Do you feel as a church member that even though we've taken away an element of that do you feel like you still have a say in matters?

Jenny: Oh, I think so. Yeah. Something's going to bother me enough then I always go to speak to somebody about it. Okay.

Researcher: So it doesn't feel like you're left out of the loop now?

Jenny: Oh no. No.

Researcher: One of the things that came up was that some people believed that our elders need to be a little bit more visible. Like they're not, not really sure who they are and that and that sorta thing. Any ideas on, at first, I guess, do you agree? And then if so, how can we, how could we do that?

Jenny: Possibly more visible. I mean, I'm not really sure. How could they be more visible? Unless you just send them up every Sunday morning for announcements. I'm an elder here. Here's what we're going to come in for the week and list. They're the ones responsible for doing that. Maybe that's more visibility. I, I think man, that might be more of people just not being active enough in to know who's doing what.

Researcher: That's fair. Um we also decided with this model to still have someone that we call the pastor and so it's, we, we've kind of alluded it to like a point guard in basketball. No more real authority but a lot more visibility and then more responsibility. Do you think that was a good move or do you think that hurts? Do you think it's important for us to still have someone at our church called the pastor? Or do you wish we kinda smoothed everything out?

Jenny: Yeah, I think it's absolutely important. Scriptural. There just needs to be a leader. Such even if they're still, I want to say a board, but a group of people that are doing it. Yeah. I think if you, if you took that away, people

may also, it would be a bit confused that I would think there'd be some confusion cause they're rest of the elders are not necessarily going to be pastors.

Researcher: You see a distinction there then.

Jenny: I do and it should be based on gifts.

Researcher: Right, right. Definitely. Yeah.

Jenny: It's not everybody's gift.

Researcher: At least the, the teaching aspect, which is the most visible part. Yeah, for sure. That's, yeah, they're able to teach, but not always. Yeah. Overall do you think this change to elder leadership was number one, good? And do you think, two, it was necessary?

Jenny: Yes. To both. When you get closer to what the scripture says, that's okay. That's good thing.

Researcher: Anything else that you'd like to add? Think of it like this. Is there something that you'd want to tell another church considering this kind of change? You know, is there anything else you'd want to add to this discussion?

Jenny: Well, I mean, I definitely think it should be done in all churches. Just again, just biblical approach to things. But I'm searching out your leadership, you know, for those who really do fit the criteria. And that might be a challenge, which I think was in our church.

Researcher: Anything else to add? No. You've already answered that one. Yes. You would recommend it. Yes. and then I already had that note that we just discussed. All right. I think that's it. Okay. All right. Thank you very much.

INTERVIEW WITH JESSICA

Researcher: Okay. I'm here with Jessica Dresbach. Jess, I have to read this first to start the research in which you're about to participate is designed to describe our churches transition to elder leadership. The research is being conducted by Josh Remy for purposes of dissertation research. In it, you will be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church. The transition to elder leadership and the current state of leadership in our church. Participation in the study is totally voluntary and you're free to withdraw from the study at any time. I will be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please do not let that affect your answers at any time. If you want me to strike something from the record or just keep it anonymous let me know. Otherwise, your name will be attached to your comments. Do you understand and agree to participate?

Jessica: Yes.

Researcher: Okay. Jess, what were your first impressions of the idea for FBC to transition to this thing called elder leadership?

Jessica: Initially because I don't like change too much. I did was like, no. That would probably be my initial thought. Yeah, that's the short answer.

Researcher: Had you ever interacted with the idea of elders in a church before?

Jessica: I had heard of other churches who had elders, like different family members who attended churches who had elders. But I don't think I ever had a conversation with anyone about what that meant or even like scripturally looked at what the implications were.

Researcher: Okay. Uh the, the transition that we went through seemed to, we'll talk about the results later. Okay. But the consensus seems to be that that transition went pretty well without a lot of fighting or anything, would you agree?

Jessica: Yes.

Researcher: Why do you think that is?

Jessica: I think it went smoothly because it was clearly laid out. It wasn't like something that was done in secret that just went, you know, behind people's backs. People clearly understood what was going on. They understand that biblically like, okay, this makes sense. This isn't it, you know, something that we're just doing cause it feels good. And then they were involved each step of the process. So I think when we do it that way, people tend to get on board with the idea and just flows.

- Researcher: You brought up something that actually came up in the survey quite a bit, that it was demonstrated biblically, that it was shown that, okay, the New Testament churches seem to have this pattern of leadership. Were you surprised at the amount of biblical support for this kind of church government?
- Jessica: Yes. I guess just cause it was something I hadn't even really thought about, but then when you really look at it, it's like, Huh, you know, God never said you need a pastor to lead a church. It is supposed to be a group of men who are honoring the Lord that are leading you in that way. So yeah, I think I was surprised when I looked at it.
- Researcher: How do you think it got missed before? Not just by you but just churches? Even Southern Baptist just don't operate this way even though we see it in scripture. Do you think it's been previously just overlooked or ignored and seen as kind of irrelevant? We don't have to do that.
- Jessica: I think it's more people see it as irrelevant that we do church differently than they did. Now we know we have large churches, so they had house churches, so it's a different not that that's true. It shouldn't be like that, but I just think people, they say, well, we'll just take that as a different interpreted differently maybe, or they just don't even look into it. They don't think about it. They're not concerned with it.
- Researcher: Another reason that came up a lot in the surveys was trust. People said, well, I just kind of trusted the pastor. I trusted the deacons that seemed to be for it. I trusted the Constitution Committee. Trust seemed to play into this. What builds that trust in, in your mind for people to be able to agree to such a change and not really put up a fight and just go with it? What builds that kind of trust?
- Jessica: I think what built that trust was relationship. People understood who the men making these decisions where they know who you are. Like most people in the church, they've known you forever. Like they, they really, they love you. They know who you are, they know what you believe, they know that you're not trying to lead them in a wrong direction. So they have that relationship built and they see I guess the way that those men live their lives and lead. Yeah, I think that's what
- Researcher: Absent that trust in all of those different parties, do you think we could've made this change?
- Jessica: No, I don't think so
- Researcher: One of the other things that came up was a lot of people struggle to see the difference between deacons and elders. There was just a general confusion there when we first introduced it and honestly, even now, people still struggle with it. Uh first why do you think that confusion is there?

Jessica: I think it's there because it's just never been something our church has done before. So it's, I guess the, when you're comfortable doing one way to do something different that you don't have knowledge of, it just takes time and repetition of understanding. I'm looking to really get that solid foundation. It's hard to do something you've never seen done. I think that's why it's there cause I don't feel like it's that confusing. Like I mean they're, they're separate roles doing similar things, but they're clearly different. So I feel like it's, it's in scripture at least they're defined fairly clearly. I just think you're making a change to something you haven't done. It's just not.

Researcher: Do you think in your experience, at least from the outside looking in that that we treated deacons as elders kind of here?

Jessica: I think in many ways, yes. But it also kind of depended on the pastor because some pastors that have let the elders, the deacons have more power and others wouldn't. So yes and no. It just depended on the leadership styles in the pastor.

Researcher: In the past, before we changed the constitution a couple of years ago, our congregation was fully democratic and I would call it congregational government, means we've voted on most things, just about everything in business meetings.

Jessica: Yes.

Researcher: Do you personally miss anything about that?

Jessica: No. (laughing)

Researcher: Why do you laugh?

Jessica: Because they took forever. It's just like such a small things, like we'd like to buy a lawn mower. It's like, okay, do we really need to do voting? I don't know. It just seems very trivial.

Jessica: As a member, even though we've made this switch and we don't vote on those things now, do you feel like you still have a say in matters?

Jessica: Yeah, I still think I have a say. If there's something that I'm concerned with, I can bring it up.

Researcher: Some of our people believe too that our elders need to be more visible. Our lay elders, especially not me or Val, but but Barry, Gary, Gary would you agree with that or not?

Jessica: I agree with that. I think that they need to be,

Researcher: How do you think we could do that?

Jessica: That's the problem going...That was the question thing and I'm not really sure. Like I think like Barry doing announcements. I think that's great because it gets his face up there. But I know not all of them feel comfortable doing that. So that's a hard thing. I'm not really sure what the answer is. Cause ultimately to go before our congregation is the easiest way to get them saying but just maybe I know, I know they're all doing small groups and things like that. Trying to do relationships. I think that's probably more effective than it just to, for them to be known of just to be on the stage.

Researcher: In this structure we kept someone called the pastor. When we don't necessarily, we saw in scripture you don't necessarily always see that, but we do occasionally see a point person called the the pastor. Do you think that was a good idea for us to do or do you think that hurts the visibility of the other elders? Should we smooth it out completely?

Jessica: I don't know how to answer that. I think having a pastor, if you would get rid of that title and just have elders in that there might be like, does everyone get paid? Like how does that work? I think that would be kind of the thing to work through. Having a head pastor is more comfortable cause everybody, you know, they know who to go to. The person in charge within that still is like adding to that pressure of that one position. Rather than having like pastors or elders, you know, that board. I have a friend who has all elder led church and that's, it's a very neat process to do that. But I don't know how all that would work here. Yeah. So I don't, can't give a clear yes or no on that.

Researcher: Overall, do you think this change to elder leadership was number one good and number two necessary?

Jessica: Yes. Yes,

Researcher: Yes and yes. Uh anything else you'd like to add about this? Just an opinion that you have or an observation that you have a, you can think about it this way. Is there something you'd tell another church that was considering this kind of change?

Jessica: I've talked to a lot of different friends about this and when you're going through the change and then post change and just to get an understanding of, you know, how do you do church? And a lot churches don't do elder based, and I have highly recommended it. I just think it is, yeah, just a more scripturally, biblically sound approach where it is not placing so much authority, so much pressure on one person. It's, it's disturbing and it's ultimately going to be better for your congregation and for the world you're trying to reach when you have men who understand their role and

can live that out. Yeah. To me... I have talked about it and I think it's good.

Researcher: It's funny, as my next question was, would you recommend it for churches like ours? So I wrote down, you have recommended it. You're first person to answer it like that. Any other, anything else to add?

Jessica: No, I don't think so. That was nice.

Researcher: Well, thank you, Jessica.

Jessica: You're welcome.

INTERVIEW WITH MATT

Researcher: I'm here with Matt Hines, a member of our congregation talking about our transition to a plurality of elders. Matt, the research in which you're about to participate is designed to describe our churches transitioned to elder leadership. This research is being conducted by Josh Remy for purposes of dissertation research and it you will be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church transitioned to elder leadership and the current state of leadership in our church. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you're free to withdraw from the study at any time. I will be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please do not let that affect your answers at any time. If you want me to strike something from the record or keep it anonymous, just let me know. Do you understand and agree to participate?

Matt: Yes.

Researcher: Then let's roll. What were your first impressions of the idea for First Baptist Church to transition to elder leadership?

Matt: I was a little bit shocked. I'm surprised I didn't, didn't know exactly what to think. And then once I heard more about it and heard who the potential elders who are, I mean I was, I was comfortable with it. Then I'm always a little bit shocked by change about anything in life. I'm kind of a routine person.

Researcher: Uh you say you were shocked and surprised at the, had you heard of this type of structure before and you're surprised that our church was moving towards it or was the whole thing new?

Matt: No. I'd heard of the structure before. I was just surprised that our church was moving towards it.

Researcher: Why? Because it's just not a thing SBC churches do or not something...

Matt: I'm, I'm not an expert. I'll just, you know, the other churches I've been to, they had deacons and not elders, so I was just really shocked.

Researcher: The entire transition of this, we'll talk about results here in a minute, but just focusing on when we announced it, we voted for it, all of that seemed to go pretty well at our church. Do you agree?

Matt: I agree.

Researcher: Why do you think that was?

Matt: Um the leadership of the church was, I mean, you, Val, people doing announcements where they all talked about it on Sunday mornings in front of the congregation for awhile. It was brought up, it was discussed. I believe I came to the business or the membership meeting. A few of them. It was discussed at that point in time to so very transparent, so to speak. It wasn't like there was a hidden agenda. We're wanting to get someone to be in charge so I don't have to deal with someone else when I want to make decisions. It wasn't one of those type of deals.

Researcher: It's interesting that you brought that up. You never felt like that?

Matt: No, not at all.

Researcher: So just the sheer number of discussions, the times that came up that you think were very beneficial.

Matt: Yeah. It was brought up multiple times that we had times that people who don't like change and you know, it gave them time to think about the pros, the cons, to sink in and not be surprised by it.

Researcher: On the surveys that we just did, last month I think it was, many people listed trust as one of the reasons that they favored the transition. They trusted the leadership, they trusted what was being put forth. Do you think that was indeed a factor and if so, what is it that builds that trust in your opinion?

Matt: Honesty. Um track record of the people who are leaders in the church. And when I say leaders, I mean people who were previously deacons as well as yourself and Val, I mean, you guys have a good solid track record, not lots of skeletons hanging the closets and things. I mean it's just that trust.

Researcher: It's just a hypothetical question. What do you think would have happened to our church? Had trust not been there?

Matt: Loss of membership.

Researcher: Do you think we could have made this change or not?

Matt: I think you could have but, I think you may have lost some membership. Hypothetically.

Researcher: Hypothetically. Yes. I think you're probably right though. Another thing that came up in the surveys, many people said that the demonstration of elder leadership taken from the Bible shown that it was in the Bible helped convince them even when they were a little skeptical. Were you personally

surprised by the amount of biblical support for this kind of church government or had you seen it there before?

Matt: I would say that I had before, but that was not really a thought process then what through my mind.

Researcher: Do you think with, with the fact that it is there and it's shown that the early churches were, were operating in that way do you think had been previously overlooked or just ignored and seen as irrelevant?

Matt: I would say probably ignored and seen as irrelevant, at least in my upbringing.

Researcher: Hard to miss it at least. Right. And then when you're reading, you see your elders referenced.

Matt: Yup.

Researcher: Why do you think SBC churches in general, since you've been here and there why do you think that we ignore it for so many decades? Any, any thoughts?

Matt: Probably traditions. You know, you have the deacons. That's, that's the only leadership besides the preacher and traditions.

Researcher: Interesting that you bring up deacons. Another thing that came up in the survey was that many people struggled to see a difference between deacons and elders. Both biblically initially and then practically now.

Matt: Deacons in my understanding are supposed to help widows and, and people in the church that are in need of help. And the elder supposed to be like the leadership, is that correct?

Researcher: That's correct. So why do you think that got mixed up?

Matt: Probably because the previous role, the Deacon's.

Researcher: So that you think how our church treated deacons in the past confuse the issue.

Matt: Yeah. Yeah.

Researcher: How do you think we could help clear up that now and show that distinction that these are two different roles?

Matt: That's a complicated question. I think it just certain situations throughout, you know, the church may come up with if you have families in need or

what is in need. I mean obviously that would be more of the job of the Deacon if it's a family situation or something else. You know that the church needs to attend to with a family and not be more of a job of elders? Maybe just the, the roles that they play throughout the church.

Researcher: Okay.

Matt: Kind of a tough question to answer.

Researcher: Tell me about it. In the past congregation, along with many SBC churches has been fully democratic. We vote on most things at, at business meetings. Do you miss anything about that?

Matt: No.

Researcher: Nothing?

Matt: I think that all comes down to trust.

Researcher: Do you feel that as a, as a member of our congregation that you have a say in matters here?

Matt: Sure.

Researcher: You don't feel like you're on the outside looking in now that we have elders or anything like that?

Matt: Naa. One question. I knew we had the Gary, Gary, Gary and Barry, correct? Who replaced the one Gary?

Researcher: Nobody.

Matt: Nobody. Okay. I put that on my survey because I didn't know.

Researcher: Several people were confused by it. And again, we need to probably talk about that some more. Okay. In fact, that's kind of my next question. Many people believed our elders need to be more visible. And in your opinion, how could we do that? I think on your survey you got 'em right? I don't think you listed Ernie Bowman.

Matt: I didn't. No. I was kinda shocked that he was not at the start but I thought probably...

Researcher: He declined.

Matt: I figured it had something to do with this stage of his life. I figured that's why.

Researcher: So how, how do you think we can make our elders more visible?

Matt: Possibly. I mean, I know some of them do the announcements in the mornings. That might be one way when they get up there saying, I'm a member, I'm an elder at the church here, part of my role and describe what their role or responsibility is and how they may help to serve if there's something family needs.

Researcher: That's good. I like that. Uh one of the ways we structured this was that we still have a point person, one of the elders that's called the pastor. Do you like that or do you think it hurts the visibility of the other elders? Do you think that was a good idea?

Matt: Uh, I don't have any preference on that.

Researcher: All right. Overall then, do you think this change to elder leadership was good? Number one, and do you it was necessary number two.

Matt: I have to think about that for a minute.

Researcher: Feel free.

Matt: So I would say it's good.

Researcher: Do you think it was necessary?

Matt: I think the verdict's still out there enough thinking it a little bit more time just to see

Researcher: Anything else you'd like to add? And I guess think about it in this way. What is something that you would tell another church that was considering this change?

Matt: Well, obviously it's a way to get more, more, or I shouldn't say more feet on the ground in different capacities or different roles to, to be serving the church.

Researcher: Would you recommend it for churches like ours?

Matt: I would not recommend it to it. Not, yeah or no. Excuse me. I would not, not recommended on y'all think are okay. If a church was going to do that. I mean, I think at this point I wouldn't be saying Gung Ho yes, go for it. But I wouldn't say, no, you don't want to do that.

Researcher: Okay, I got you. So you'd be somewhat neutral, but if you're going to go for it and then go for it, but you wouldn't go into a church and say, hey, you need to do this now.

Matt: Not at this point. Maybe in the future. We're only looking at a couple of years.

Researcher: I would not not. Alright. Anything else you'd want to add? Double negatives. Yeah. That's nice. Works out. I get what you're saying.

Matt: No, I don't think so.

Researcher: All right, man. Thank you for your time.

INTERVIEW WITH MIKE

Researcher: Okay. I'm here with Mike MacCrae. Mike, I gotta read this for you. The research that you're about to participate is designed to describe our churches transition to elder leadership. The research is being conducted by Josh Remy for purposes of dissertation research. And this research you'll be asking multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church, transition to elder leadership and the current state of leadership in our church. Participation in this study is totally voluntary. You're free to withdrawal from the study at any time. I will be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please do not let that affect your answers at any time. If you want me to strike something from the record or make something anonymous, just let me know. Do you understand and agree to participate?

Mike: Yes I do.

Researcher: All right. First you were relatively new to the church. How long had you and Barb been here? When we started talking about this?

Mike: You were talking about changes to the constitution right when we started coming.

Researcher: Can you ballpark that month for me?

Mike: I think it was April two years ago, 2017.

Researcher: So we had already started the process of the Constitution Committee. So we had started talking about it a little here and there.

Mike: Yeah, I think it was just the changes to the constitution were just being finalized at that time with that. Okay.

Researcher: It was shortly after that. If not, if not then. Right. What were your first impressions of the idea for us to transition to elder leadership?

Mike: Oh, really excited. I thought that was great. Long overdue for many churches.

Researcher: So I noticed in your in your survey, obviously you had studied this before. Did that cause any attraction to our church as a result of that?

Mike: No, not really. I didn't know that that was in progress, but I had been involved at many different levels in transitions going on in other churches too. So I was really glad to see that that was coming about here when we first came. Actually it was what kind of solidified our desire to join the church. Shortly after we started coming.

Researcher: You said involved in other transitions where those transitions similar to this one or were they a little different?

Mike: They kind of differed. I mean, it depended on the church.

Researcher: Was it to elders, I guess is what I mean.

Mike: Yeah. I guess I had seen a number of different types of transitions in that direction. I mean, everything from formalized to very informal but still heading toward an eldership led church rather than a single pastor, that church.

Researcher: But you never saw the completion of any of those?

Mike: Oh, sure. Yeah. That was actually part of those changes and in many cases, so the first case was in New Hampshire when I was a young believer. Our pastor there was attempting to go from a pastor led church to an elder led church. And it went down in flames just due to his own pride. But he tried I think he saw the value in it. I had been a deacon at several other churches and an elder in several of the churches in my travels. So I've seen the whole different political structure. The leadership structure and a number of different churches, Baptist and nondenominational.

Researcher: Very interesting. I did not know that. I should have had you as a consultant on this.

Mike: Well, it's been an interesting journey actually. Just seeing how churches in America struggle with the whole concept of church leadership coming out of a culture. I think a pastor led churches trying to come back into a biblical approach to church leadership.

Researcher: I would say that the transition to plural eldership here went pretty well. Would you agree?

Mike: Right, yeah, I really agree. I agree.

Researcher: Especially in comparison to other churches.

Mike: Yeah. I haven't seen any undercurrents or anything, you know, talking it down. It was virtually silent as far as I know. And that may just be because we were new to the church and didn't have a lot of deep relationships with people in the church early on. And, and even as those were building. I haven't seen anybody talk negatively about it at all. Not one comment.

Researcher: Why do you think that is? Why do you think it went smoothly here when other places it doesn't?

Mike: Well, I'm not sure. I don't know if the past history of First Baptist may have lent something toward it or not, but I think it was presented very well over time. I don't think anything was held back or hidden. I think everything was very open. I don't think I would've done it any differently myself.

Researcher: One of the reasons a lot of people listed, in fact, I'd say most people listed trust as one of the reasons they favored the transition. I even believe that you did. So did your wife. With you guys being so new what, how, how was that trust built?

Mike: Well, I knew some of the people in First Baptist before we started coming here. And especially the spiritual leaders. I knew Gary Pack and Gary and Sharon Cooper. Several others in the church. Ernie Bowman had known him through Calvary and a past history with that. So I was comfortable with the first of all, the proposal to go to an elder leadership style and then also with their selections.

Researcher: What would you say would have happened if that foundation of trust wasn't there and we tried to do this

Mike: Probably wouldn't succeed very well. There would have been people that were outspoken wanting to keep things the way they were type of thing. I've seen that one or two churches that I've attended in the past, so no, didn't see or hear any of that here. So I knew there was a, an overall level of trust. I think it was not expressed, but implied.

Researcher: Many people said that the demonstration of elder leadership from the Bible helped convince them during this process. This isn't relevant to you because you've been through it before, but why do you think, I guess I should say it this way, why do you think some people may have been surprised by the amount of biblical support for this kind of government?

Mike: Surprised? Maybe only due to the fact that many of the older church members probably were not familiar with that style of church leadership in a Southern Baptist church. Okay.

Researcher: Do you think it had been previously overlooked in the SBC or just ignored and seen as irrelevant?

Mike: I don't know if it was ignored in the SBC or not. I think the SBC was kind of formed a cultural approach you know, 100 years ago and, and even further back a lot of the churches only at a single pastor that was many times itinerant. So I think that was just kind of the culture that evolved over time in our country here was you were lucky to have a pastor if you had one.

Researcher: Yeah. And that is the history does show that's true early on. Why don't you think that changed with larger churches and why did we keep that single pastor model?

Mike: I'm not sure.

Researcher: Cause it's what we've always done. Right.

Mike: Yeah. I think that has a lot to do with it.

Researcher: Many in our church have struggled to see the difference between deacons and elders, both biblically and practically. Why do you think that is?

Mike: Well, I think in the SBC, a lot of the church leadership structure has been a pastor led with the assistance of deacons. I was a deacon that was ordained at Calvary Baptist here in Piketon and even though we were called deacons, I think we were actually more of the spiritual leadership with a little good actual deacon interaction with the congregation as well. So it was kind of a dual role. And I think in many cases that's been the pattern for spiritual leadership, not just in Southern Baptist churches, but Independent Baptist even nondenominational.

Researcher: How do you think we could help clear that up now you have a separation between the two, the difference between deacons and elders

Mike: Teaching... just knowing the Bible and helping people understand the differences in the roles. I think the scripture is very clear about it.

Researcher: In the past our church here was fully democratic. We voted on most things in business meetings. You've been in other churches that were like that. Okay. Do you miss anything about that?

Mike: No, not really. I take the democracy aspect of it as more of an American government carry over in our culture and kind of invaded the church government aspect as well.

Researcher: Do you feel that you still have a say in matters as a member?

Mike: Yeah, yeah. I don't have any qualms about it. I feel the freedom to come to you or to any of the elders. I haven't had any issues to really do that. I think probably being part of the finance committee, I think I have referred the committee to seek the wisdom and advice or counsel of the church elders on matters that really didn't pertain to finance but came up during those meetings.

- Researcher: Based on one of the things you said there, do you think we're still too democratic here since we do take some larger matters to the church and vote
- Mike: Maybe from the perspective of trying to continue the transition respecting an older generation, especially has been always heard that start with leadership. So I think just being sensitive and in a broad perspective to help the church to feel like they're still a part of all the decision making processes. I think things are communicated well. So like the church as a general body appreciates that.
- Researcher: So practically we're not too democratic. You'd say that there's a practical reason for it. What about biblically?
- Mike: Biblically I think we still have a little ways to go and just really fully embracing the eldership style rather than a single pastor or pastor and deacons.
- Researcher: Our people really believed that all of our elders need to be more visible. How do you think we can do that?
- Mike: Well, from an eldership perspective, how I see it, elders should be the next in line to succeed if anything happens to our pastor they probably are to be given opportunity to teach and preach, especially preach. Because if and when the time comes, when we need a new pastor, they should come from the, the elders shouldn't have to go outside of the church ever.
- Researcher: So you agree. So you referenced there someone called the pastor and we retained that in the model. We'd call it a point person or a lead pastor. Do you think that's a good idea or do you think that hurts the visibility of the other elders? You think it's a compromise?
- Mike: I think it's a little bit of a compromise in a sense. Only from the perspective that churches in America typically have a single point of contact from a spiritual leadership standpoint. Even in the midst of a body of elders, usually that person either pre-existed a body or has just been the person brought in or who grew up into that position. I think it's still a biblical concept. Peter was the head of the church in Jerusalem. Timothy was the pastor at the church in Ephesus, but he wasn't the only one there. So I think there has to be a little bit of a hierarchy of some sort rather than just a group of people that co lead in every aspect is everybody has different gifts. Not every elder is a, a gifted preacher. However they have strong spiritual qualities and capabilities usually come in to that role for more than one reason
- Researcher: On your form. When I asked you to list the elders, you actually listed Ernie Bowman who's not an elder. What is it about Ernie that made you think he was an elder and yet not officially one?

Mike: Well, I guess I just forgot first of all, but...

Researcher: It's not that you failed the test

Mike: Yeah, just thought that... Tried to recollect who they were and then he just came to mind as with being one of them, just because he's visible more than anything else. You know, he goes around and shakes hands, he serves communion, he collects the offering, he teaches, he visits. So I think he demonstrates a lot of the qualities of a good elder.

Researcher: All right. A couple of cleanup questions. So overall, do you think this change to elder leadership was good and do you think it was necessary?

Mike: Yes to both.

Researcher: Anything else you'd like to add? Let me phrase it this way. Is there something you would tell another church considering this change?

Mike: I'd pick your elders wisely with much prayer and solicit the wisdom of the church, especially those who are walking closer to the Lord. You're careful of traps, political traps, of favorites and things like that. I've seen it all and I've seen it be extremely damaging to the church body if the wrong people are selected as elders,

Researcher: Would you recommend it for churches like ours, the average SBC church, do you think that they should make a change to, to this type of leadership?

Mike: Absolutely. I think it's required from a biblical standpoint. I don't think any church should be modeled any other way, regardless of denomination.

Researcher: Alright. Anything else to share?

Mike: Nothing else comes to mind.

Researcher: All right, thank you, Mike.

INTERVIEW WITH MISSY

Researcher: I'm here with Missy Branham and we are talking First Baptist transition to a plurality of elders and Missy I'm gonna read this informed consent to you. The research in which you're about to participate is designed to describe our churches transition to elder leadership. As research is being conducted by Josh Remy for purposes of dissertation research in it, you will be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions and the history of the church. The transition to elder leadership in the current state of leadership in our church. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you're free to withdraw from the study at any time. I will be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please do not let that affect your answers at any time. If you want me to strike something from the record or keep it anonymous, just let me know. Do you understand and agree to participate?

Missy: Yes.

Researcher: All right. What were your first impressions of the idea for FBC to transition to elder leadership?

Missy: I didn't know what it was, so I was I had like a knowledge so I didn't know what it was.

Researcher: Had you ever heard of elders in a church?

Missy: Yes, I've heard of elders, but again, just thought they were old guys.

Researcher: Just old guys. Gotcha.

Missy: Yeah. Just old guys, elders. Yeah. No, I've always thought of elders as being an older person.

Researcher: Makes Sense. The general consensus has been that the transition, we'll talk about the results later, but the transition from announcing it all the way up through the vote when pretty well. Yes. So would you agree?

Missy: Yes, I agree.

Researcher: Why do you think that is?

Missy: I guess maybe especially my misconception of what it was. I mean, I, when I first heard it, I thought, what is this? But then as we were going through it, I thought, well, this, this is great. I mean, this is good.

Researcher: What did that for you?

- Missy: Well, just learning. I mean, just going through the process and you explanations of, you know, what their role would be in, you know, as far as and deacons, what their role would be on down. So it just became clearer and it was, I thought it was good. I agreed with it.
- Researcher: On the surveys that we did, many people listed trust as one of the reasons they were okay with the transition. Either it was a trust of the pastor or a trust of the constitution committee, trust of those who were put into leadership, what do you think built that trust? How is trust built in general?
- Missy: I believe actions, actions speak louder than words. So you know, seeing, seeing you when you represent or, you know, when you told us about it. And then going through the process of electing the elders, seeing the ones that were being you know, elected, we trusted them or I trusted them. I knew them a long time. Know their character.
- Researcher: The other thing that came up for a lot of people in the survey was that they said the, the fact that Elder leadership was demonstrated from the Bible helped convince them. I don't know where you were at personally, if you knew it was a biblical form of government or not, but were you surprised by the amount of biblical support for this kind of government?
- Missy: Well, I was, I did not know that.
- Researcher: Do you think it had previously been overlooked or just ignored and seen as irrelevant?
- Missy: Probably irrelevant. I'm, I'm thinking.
- Researcher: Do you think that, do you have any other experience with SBC churches?
- Missy: No. No. Okay.
- Researcher: Seems like a common thing and yeah, that we avoid that kind of government for some reason. Another thing that came up many struggled to see the difference between a deacons and elders. Both biblically, practically a very high number of people in the survey listed that as an issue that they had. They just didn't understand. Why do you think there's that confusion?
- Missy: I don't know. I was one of those people. I and I mean, I still don't really see a difference. I mean a small difference, but I don't, I don't know why. Maybe we just assume, you know, I don't
- Researcher: Do you think how this church worked with deacons in the past kinda confused that issue?

Missy: Maybe. Maybe.

Researcher: Would you say that the deacons maybe were in a role of elders?

Missy: Yes, that's, yeah. Right.

Researcher: But I think somebody brought up that there was kind of a dual role. They did a little bit of both.

Missy: It was when I first came and joined, you know, we had deacons and I was assigned a deacon, you know, and so, you know, that was like my deacon then I guess I could go to if I was, you know, needing struggling or whatever. And so, and then that stopped. I didn't have a deacon and you know, pastor changed and then we didn't have deacons. We had, well we had a group of deacons and I guess we could go to all of them or any of them we choose, but I never saw and maybe they were playing the role of elder and I just didn't know it or, but I never had, even when I had an assigned deacon, I never had, we never had a relate and I never talked to them, sat down and talk to him or anything. I never needed them for anything. They never reached out to me either. To check on me as well, you know, and if I was assigned to them you know, it was, it was two way street there. I mean, neither one of us did it.

Researcher: Can you tell me when that stopped?

Missy: Probably when pastor Roger came, I would say, I think when Gary Pack was here as when I became a member and then when he stepped down Roger was the, the new pastor and I don't, I don't think we had deacons assigned to us at that point, so I don't know the year or anything, but it was probably during pastor Houck's

Researcher: In the past our congregation before this constitution change was fully democratic. We voted on almost everything. Do you miss anything about that?

Missy: I do. I kind of do miss it. I feel like I'm out of the loop sometimes. But I don't know. That could just be me. I feel like that about other things as well, but not just church things, but I don't know. I can't explain that about this, I guess.

Researcher: Do you feel you still have a say in matters?

Missy: I do feel like that, yes. But I sometimes find out after the fact and it's like, Oh, when did that happen? You know, so not that it was a bad thing. I just, I don't know, felt left out. But I don't need to be included in everything. I know the, I know, well, I, I trust that the church is being led correctly.

- Researcher: One thing that came up too although I found some disagreement on this, some people believe that our elders need to be more visible. Would you agree with that or not?
- Missy: Ah, I think they're, I think they're the same. I think they're, no, I think they're visible. Um I, I don't have that problem. I mean, I see him. Ah, I mean, I don't see him doing anything different than what they were doing before, but I mean, I see him like they, they are, you know, faithful attenders. They come and, you know...
- Researcher: Another part of this that we designed, we remain allowed there to be a point person that we still called the pastor. Do you like that or do you think it hurts the visibility of the other elders? The authority of the other elders. Was it a good idea to keep a point person called the Pastor.
- Missy: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I think we need to have a pastor. I think if someone from outside came for the first time, they would be expecting to see a pastor if we just included him in with like the elders. I don't think, I don't know. I think people in general think there should be a pastor. I mean that may be wrong, but I think, I think, you know, cause I'll say, oh my pastor, you know, if I'm ever talking about my pastor if you weren't called that, if you were just an elder, I would have to say, well my elder, this just doesn't sound as right. I don't know to
- Researcher: Overall then, do you think this change to elder leadership was number one good and number two, do you think it was necessary?
- Missy: I think it was good, yes. Necessary. I, I don't, I don't know that it was necessary now, but cause I don't really see, like I said, I don't really see a change in what they did when they were deacons because I think all of them, or almost all of them were deacons. No, they all were deacons. So I don't see them do anything different than when they were deacons. So necessary it's, I guess, no, maybe not.
- Researcher: Anything else you'd like to add?
- Missy: I don't think so.
- Researcher: You think about it this way, a, is there something you would tell another church that was considering this change?
- Missy: No, I don't think so. I mean, like I said, I don't see any difference. So I mean, if there's going to be a difference, I might have more of an opinion if there's a difference, but I don't, it's pretty much the same.
- Researcher: Okay. Well, thank you, Missy.

INTERVIEW WITH RICK

Researcher: All right. This is an interview with Rick Noel. Rick is a part of our congregation serves on a couple of committees and leads music. Rick, I have to read this informed consent to you first. The research in which you're about to participate is designed to describe our church's transition to elder leadership and this research is being conducted by Joshua Remy for purposes of dissertation research. In it, you will be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church, the transition to elder leadership and the current state of leadership in our church. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you're free to withdrawal from the study at any time. I will be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please do not let that affect your answers at any time. If you want me to strike something from the record or keep it anonymous, just let me know. Do you understand and agree to participate?

Rick: Yes.

Researcher: All right. Rick, what was your first impression of the idea for First Baptist to transition to elder leadership?

Rick: I guess the best word would be curious. I guess I wasn't for or against I was open to the change, but I wanted to learn more about it before I really signed off on it.

Researcher: Had you had any experience with elder leadership type churches before?

Rick: No.

Researcher: Ever heard of the concept?

Rick: Yes.

Researcher: We'll talk about the results in a minute. But when I refer to the transition here, I meant from the announcement to the approval the general consensus has been that part seemed to go pretty well, wasn't a lot of dissension or anything like that. Would you agree?

Rick: Yes.

Researcher: Uh why do you think that was?

Rick: I really don't know. For me personally, I mean, we, being a deacon, we had a lot of discussion prior to bringing it out, so it wasn't thrown on me. Real quick, I, I was prepared. I was prepared and prepared myself with the rest of the congregation. I really couldn't answer.

Researcher: One of the things that came up in the survey when I asked why people favored the transition, a lot of them said trust. Either they trusted the pastor or they trusted the deacons. That seemed to be for it or they trusted the constitution committee that oversold the, the change. What do you think builds that kind of trust?

Rick: I guess past history you, you know, when you just, you just gotta look on history and our church I believe our history, you know, we never, we've never really had a lot of conflict or things like that. So I think that that helps build the trust. You know, we wasn't going through a lot of stressful times or anything like, so.

Researcher: What do you think would have happened in our church if that trust wasn't there, you think we could have made this change?

Rick: No, I don't think we could have made this change if there were certain people in the church who would have been against it. I mean, if the deacons would have came out against it, I don't think it would ever happen. I think, you know, I think the congregation had trust or faith in the people that had currently been in charge per se. And that these, the transition,

Researcher: Another thing that came up on the surveys was that many people said that the demonstration of this type of leadership, this type of church government from the Bible, the evidence that that was shown from the Bible help to convince them a, were you personally surprised by the amount of biblical support of this kind of government?

Rick: No, not really.

Researcher: You already knew it was there. What do you think then has it been previously overlooked or just ignored and seen as kind of irrelevant that that's not something we have to do?

Rick: No, I think that's true. It's not something we have to do. And a lot of times she's just, it's what you've always grown up with. You know, we've always been led in a different, different way. And, and there is, you know, a biblical support on the way we was doing it in the past. So it was just, it was just a shift. And like you mentioned, there was biblical support. So it, that, that helped make the transition, especially as it was explained from the pulpit and in other ways

Researcher: Another issue that came up, many people struggled and still struggle, some of them to see the difference between deacons and elders. Both biblically and practically. There's just some confusion there. Why do you think there is that confusion in our church in particular, but I would say Southern Baptist churches in general?

Rick: It's just a ignorance lack of... When you're dealing with congregation, probably 80% or better are really not real in depth in biblical teachings, biblical training. So there is just, I, I say ignorance and I don't mean that in a detrimental term. I mean, not in just the fact that people just don't know. They've never been taught, never been trained, never experienced it. So that would probably be my, the biggest statement I guess I can make on that.

Researcher: Do you think to some degree, deacons were acting as elders here?

Rick: Definitely.

Researcher: In the past our congregation was fully democratic. Congregational is what we'd call it. Meaning we voted on most things at business meetings, not everything, but most things. Do you miss anything about that?

Rick: Not yet. I think potentially it could be a problem. And I say that if, if we had the wrong people as the elders, I think that could lend towards that being a problem. I appreciate the way we do it. I think anything that has been controversial by nature or could be controversial, I think even though we didn't have to, we are still bringing it before the church. And I appreciate that. You know, it matters that you know, I don't think are controversial have been handled by the, the elders and that that has worked out real well. But I think that anything that potentially could be a problem for somebody that has been brought before the church. So we've, we've kept that transparency and I think that that has, that has worked well for us. It, you know, if we had a shift in who the elders are or, and maybe some conflict or something, I think potentially there could be problems. We just haven't experienced that

Researcher: As a member. So maybe put your, your role in the finance committee and your other leadership roles aside for a second, as a member, do you feel like you still have a say in matters?

Rick: I think I still have a voice. I, I don't feel that I had the voice I once had as a member and as a, as a member. I believe that you know, where before everything was brought before the church, I think in an open forum you could express yourself where potentially maybe you don't have that opportunity now that I think that, you know, on an issue that was a pressing issue if, if, if it was made known, I, I still think that I could go to an elder and talk to them and, and still express myself, but just not in the same manner and maybe not to the same degree.

Researcher: Something else that showed up in the survey that it was, I'd say a majority of people said that our elders need to be more visible, but I found that not everybody agrees with that. So I'll, I'll ask you first. Do you think our elders need to be more visible? Our lay elders specifically?

- Rick: Maybe to some degree.
- Researcher: How do you think we should do that then? What is that degree?
- Rick: I don't know. It's something I really need to think about. I, I think just being honest, I will, I'll mention one person's name. I think Barry Tarlton is my idea of a role model as far as an elder. He would be somebody I think that he's visible yet he's not that visible. He, he is in my opinion, he, if as I'm thinking of what I think the perfect elder would be, I think he would qualify. I think he he'd fit that mold. I think he operates his household in such a manner that it's reflected through his wife, his children. I think his role in the church with the positions he holds and things he does he provides that role model we need as an elder. I couldn't say that that to be true through all our elders, but in his case, again, I think he's very visible. Maybe in some other cases we're not as visible.
- Researcher: One of the things we decided on is we still have somebody here that we call the pastor rather than just everybody's an elder. There's still a role called the pastor. Do you think that's a good idea or bad idea? Do you think that hurts the visibility of the other elders?
- Rick: No, I think that's necessary. I think it's necessary. We have that in any type of organization, I think you need that one person who is going to be the face of your organization. No matter how much power they may or may not have. I think you need that, that one person that that is going to be the model or the picture or the face. And in our case that would be in our organization as a church that would be the pastor. And I think that's necessary.
- Researcher: A couple of closing questions then. Overall, do you think the change to elder leadership was number one good and number two, do you think it was necessary?
- Rick: I would have to say I think it was good. I would have to also say that I don't think it was necessary.
- Researcher: Anything else you'd like to add? Maybe think of it this way. Is there something you would like to tell another church considering this change?
- Rick: I haven't thought about that. No, I don't think so. I think just be very careful in your selection. Make sure you I don't know the exact words. I don't want to use say sides, but all people in your congregation are represented in your elders. Make sure everybody has a voice.
- Researcher: Would you recommend it for other churches? Like ours? You said it wasn't necessary, so I probably guessed that. But would you recommend it for say, another Baptist Church?

Rick: I would but I would want to see before I would recommend it, I would want to see their current structure. If a church didn't have enough capable people are being elders, I would not recommend it. If you know, for example, if you had a small country church that that a pastor may be really the only person with biblical knowledge, Biblical training, I don't know if I would recommend it in a, in a larger church where you have more people that can fill that role. I would probably recommend it, but I do know some churches that I, I would not recommend it. And from just knowing the congregations.

Researcher: Anything else to add?

Rick: Don't think so.

Researcher: Thank you Rick.

INTERVIEW WITH RUTH ANN

Researcher: This is an interview with Ruth Ann Moore who is a part of our congregation talking about our transition to plurality of elders. The research in which you're about to participate is designed to describe our churches transition to elder leadership. This research is being conducted by Josh Remy for purposes of dissertation research and in it you will be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church transitioned to elder leadership and the current state of leadership in our church. Participation in this study is totally voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and we'll be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please do not let that affect your answers at any time. If you want me to strike something from the record or keep it anonymous, just let me know. Do you understand and agree to participate?

Ruth Ann: Yes.

Researcher: Alright. Ruth, what were your first impressions of the idea for FBC to transition to elder leadership?

Ruth Ann: First impressions was that I went to the Bible cause this was totally new for me cause I was raised Southern Baptist and we didn't do things like this. So I, you know, with much consideration of what you had been saying. I really went and studied it on my own. And I guess I'm just, I'm blown over to the fact of why we didn't do this in the first place. Totally, totally scriptural. New Testament church should be this way. And...

Researcher: So you had never interacted with this idea before it's brought up two years ago.

Ruth Ann: Never.

Researcher: Looking at the, the transition specifically the transition part not necessarily the results. We'll talk about that later. But I think most of us have agreed that it went pretty smoothly. Do you agree?

Ruth Ann: Yes, it did.

Researcher: Why do you think that is?

Ruth Ann: I think it's because of the trust that we had built up in, in our pastor, and just what he was saying, how you encouraged us to read it on our own to study it. I don't, there's nothing that you can argue about on this and why shouldn't we do it? It's what it's what scripture says. So to me it was simple and I hope, I think that's why other people felt that way.

Researcher: You're correct. Trust was one of the issues that came up multiple times on the survey. Many people listed trust is one of the reasons they favored the transition. What builds that trust in your estimation, whether it's the pastor or the constitution committee or the deacons that were in favor of the decision? What is it that builds that trust?

Ruth Ann: Well, just, just because it was always coming before us. I mean, we were talking about it. We was getting into the scripture. We were, I think it's, and you know, knowing you for, you know, a couple of years too for the church. I mean, I've known you since you was little, but that trust was built upon that and I think that's, and you didn't, you didn't rush it, you didn't take it through like it was, it was something that was very much put before us and we could pray about it. I mean, we could see it. We could, yeah. That's what I think.

Researcher: Hypothetical. What, what do you think would have happened if that trust wasn't there? That if there was just the suspicion of, of any one of those parties, what do you think would've happened?

Ruth Ann: I think it would have split us. I really do. I think we would have had a group here that wouldn't have wanted to do it and maybe those that would and not, I never want to see that. I guess. I guess I fear that sometimes because I've been through two of those splits. I didn't, didn't want to ever see that again.

Researcher: You've already alluded to this one as well, but many people in their survey said that the demonstration of elder leadership from the Bible helped to convince them. Were you surprised by the amount of biblical support for this kind of church government?

Ruth Ann: Never, no, not surprised. It's important. Specifically what the scripture talks about on the qualifications of one. That's very important. And I have to see that on the, I have to see that in people. And you know, the fact that, that we brought those that I knew to be, you know, trustworthy, all the things that scripture put forth was good.

Researcher: As far as, as seeing this from the Bible goes, do you think it had previously just been overlooked or do you think it's ignored because it was seen as irrelevant? I mean, especially since you have a past in the SBC, can you speak to why you don't think this caught on decades ago?

Ruth Ann: You know, I wondered about that. Why do we do that all these years? What, what was it? Was it just tradition or was it because we didn't feel it? Maybe they didn't feel like it was relevant? Yeah, that has baffled me. I'm not sure about that. And after all that, think about why, why did we do that. I don't understand that at all. I said that's a, that's a baffling question to me.

- Researcher: The other thing that came up on multiple surveys was many have struggled to see the difference between deacons and elders both biblically and practically during the transition and some even now. Why do you think that is?
- Ruth Ann: I think because we're so steeped in what we were doing, so steeped in the fact that, well, there's even, even a time awhile back, this church was mainly run... really by certain people and that were deacons did the term elder never came up in the end. The distinction between what an elder was and a deacon was not ever, it was just all like lumped together, you know. I didn't, I didn't realize that, that, you know really didn't study the scripture on that because I didn't think it was relevant and myself and because I grew up that way. So that's that. That's, and that's another good question. Why?
- Researcher: Follow up on something you just said there. Do you think there were times in the life of this church that the deacons had more authority, more power, if you will, than the, than the pastor did?
- Ruth Ann: Absolutely. Absolutely. Not only this church, but I've seen it in a lot of other churches too. And you know, I've never been anything but a Southern Baptist. And the reason I can say that, the reason I say that now is because it, for me it's a choice now. When I was growing up, that was just what it was, but for me it's a choice now because of the cooperative program.
- Researcher: How do you think we could help clear up this distinction now between deacons and elders? There's a lot of confusion leftover because of the past, as you've alluded to, any ideas on helping to clear it up now?
- Ruth Ann: Well, that's just something that's going to have to be constantly, I think brought forward. Okay, here's an elder of the church and we've got him. You know, we have this kind of duty for him. That what the Bible clearly states the difference between elders and deacons and I think that needs to come up all the time. Actually. I think we need to do more actually to see that
- Researcher: In the past, our congregation, like so many SBC ones, even though it was either, maybe sometimes it was pastoral led or deacon led, but it was technically fully democratic and we voted on things or most things at business meetings, a lot of things in business meetings... do you miss anything about that?
- Ruth Ann: The business meeting part?
- Researcher: Yeah, that, I mean that's part of it, but do you miss something about being a fully democratic church?

Ruth Ann: No, I think it runs more smoothly. I mean even when it comes down to what color carpet we have, that's to me that's just ridiculous. That's just, that's not what, that's not what God has called us to do

Researcher: As a member of the church. Do you feel you still have a say in matters?

Ruth Ann: Oh yes, absolutely. I think anybody in this church can feel free to do that and that goes back to the trust again. So, yeah.

Researcher: Yet another thing that came up on the survey our people seem to really believe that our elders needed to be a little more visible. How do you think, I guess first, do you agree and then if so, how do you think we can do that?

Ruth Ann: Well, visible? How? Just in the church or what?

Researcher: Just visible... Knowing who they are and what they do.

Ruth Ann: Yeah, definitely need that more clear. I think who the elders are, what the duties of elders are. Do we see that in the elders? I think we need to hold, we all need to hold each other accountable, but I think we, those specifically we need to hold accountable.

Researcher: Do you like still having someone that we call the pastor or do you think that hurts the visibility and the structure of the other elders?

Ruth Ann: No, I think that's, that's important because I see that as a, a role that, that Jesus played even when he was here, he, he was the leader. He was somebody we need, we need specific leader called to do that. And you're, I mean, you're called to do that in, in churches. So yes, that's important.

Researcher: All right. Overall, do you think this change to elder leadership was number one, good. And do you think to it was necessary?

Ruth Ann: Good and necessary? Yes. I think yes to both.

Researcher: Both?

Ruth Ann: Yes, definitely.

Researcher: Okay. All right. Anything else that you'd like to add? Think about it like this. Is there something you would tell another church that's considering this change?

Ruth Ann: Hmm, one of the best things you can do. Yes, I do. I believe that. Really do believe it. I do believe that because it's so clear in the New Testament church, that's how it was. And, and you don't, you just don't see well, I'm

sure there was, you know, every church has problems, you know, that kept grouped up. But I just, I, I just, I want us to be as close to the scripture as possible when it comes to things like this because that's, I mean, that's why God has put it for us. We need to take it seriously.

Researcher: Have you seen do you think you've, you've pointed the Bible multiple times and as have most of our members, do you see practical benefits too though? Like let's say the Bible was completely neutral on it, would you see some benefits in the way we do things now?

Ruth Ann: Hmm, sure, sure. I think so. I'm trying, I'm trying to think of some good examples. The benefits are, I think some of the benefits are that the pastor doesn't get weighed down with everything. Because, you know, when I was growing up in a church, everything went to the pastor, go to the pastor for this, you go to the pastor for that. When you have a group of elders that can help carry that load, that's, that's the best thing because in this day and time ministry is a burnout for sure.

Researcher: So you don't think in an older model that deacon's helped with that as much as elders do with in this model?

Ruth Ann: They did try to help with that. I think it depended on who the person was.

Researcher: A lot of it goes back to that doesn't it?

Ruth Ann: It really does... The personality of the people.

Researcher: Yeah. Anything else you would add?

Ruth Ann: No.

Researcher: Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX 7

CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Church Transition to a Plurality of Elders: A Case Study

Constitution Committee Interview Protocol

Name _____

The following is a semi-structured interview protocol for an interview with members of the constitution committee. Much of this protocol is based on topics that surfaced in the precedent literature and the congregational survey. This research method will highlight the following stages mentioned in Chapter 3, Research Methodology: History, Plan, Announcement, and Results.

Informed Consent: The research in which you are about to participate is designed to describe our church's transition to elder leadership. This research is being conducted by Josh Remy for purposes of dissertation research. In this research, you will be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church, the transition to elder leadership, and the current state of leadership in our church. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. I will be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please do not let that affect your answers. At any time if you want me to strike something from the record or keep it anonymous, just let me know. Do you understand and agree to participate?

What were your first impressions of the idea for FBC to transition to elder-leadership?

The entire transition of this went very well at our church. Agree? Why do you think that is? Anything about our history that made this the right time to make the change?

How did you see your role in this transition?

What helped you most understand the structure that was being proposed?

Looking back on our meetings together, what elements of designing the structure do you remember being the most challenging or controversial?

Many struggled to see the difference between Deacons and Elders both biblically and practically. Why do you think that is? Did we not do a good job communicating that or is it just a product of our history with Deacons? What can we do to clear it up now?

In the past, our congregation was fully democratic... we voted on most things at business meetings. We could have gone to full elder rule, but decided to vote on some things still. Do you think we found a good balance or would you change something now? How do you think the congregation feels about that?

We designed a structure that kept a point-person, someone called THE pastor. Was that a good idea? Do you think that hurts the visibility of the other elders? Would you change something now?

Do we have enough elders? Would you change something about that now?

Because of your role, you got a preview of sorts and more time to review the idea. Has it worked out as you anticipated? How has it been different?

Overall, do you think this change to elder leadership was good and do you think it was necessary? Are you glad we made the change?

Anything else you would like to add? Something you would tell another church considering this change? Would you recommend it for churches like ours?

APPENDIX 8

CONSTITUTION COMMITTEE INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

(alphabetical order)

INTERVIEW WITH CHERYL

Researcher: Okay. I'm here with Cheryl Francis. She was a part of the Constitution Committee for our transition to plurality of elders. We did other things in the constitution committee of course, but I'm mainly talking about the, the transition to plural elders. I've gotta read this to you for Cheryl. The research which you're about to participate is designed to describe our churches transition to elder leadership. This research is being conducted by Josh Remy for purposes of dissertation research. In it, you will be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church, the transition to elder leadership, the current state of leadership in our church and participation in this study is totally voluntary and you're free to withdraw from the study at any time. I'll be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please do not let that affect your answers at any time. If you want me to strike something from the record or just keep it anonymous, just let me know. Do you understand and agree to participate?

Cheryl: Yes.

Researcher: All right. What were your first impressions of the idea for First Baptist to transition to elder leadership?

Cheryl: I thought that they should move towards the elder leadership just simply because it's, you know, stated in the scriptures about the leadership style and I thought it would be a good model to follow.

Researcher: Had you heard about the idea before the constitution committee?

Cheryl: Yes.

Researcher: From Val?

Cheryl: No. I heard that through sermons through you, through sermons and several of those leading up to the time we decided to discuss that can put that in the constitution before the congregation.

Researcher: Were you ever part of a, another church that had elders?

Cheryl: Yes. I grew up in a church that they didn't have the elders to start with because the church was so small when we started attending there, but through the years they developed the eldership style of leadership. They also had the deacon's in that model as well.

Researcher: So the general consensus has been that the transition, we can talk about the results later, but the transition, the announcement and the approval of it went pretty well. Would you agree?

Cheryl: Yes, I thought it went really smooth and it didn't seem to be in any time. I didn't hear anybody complain or say I don't want to follow that model or that I don't agree with that model. It seemed like everyone was very supportive of it.

Researcher: Why do you think that is?

Cheryl: I think they were educated and informed along the way as you took them through the scripture. I think they had time to discuss it. And I, I think that it was just presented in such a way that, that they agreed with it and I think they thought they were part of the process as well.

Researcher: Do you think there's anything, you've been at FBC off and on for, for awhile. Do you think there's anything about our history that made this the right time to change?

Cheryl: Well, I don't know a whole lot about the history in the past, other than when I started attending there. And of course we came off and on while we were attending somewhere else cause we had a lot of friends from there and kind of knew what was going on. But I just think that the congregation as a whole tends to want to follow biblical principles and standards rules if you want to call them that for governing. I think if they saw there was a, a better way to govern that they would be open to that. So I just think because of the type of membership we have that that made it easy to move to that because they want to do the biblical models. Not that it would be wrong not to do them, but I think they realized that at the size of our congregation where we are in time, that was a better approach than

doing by committees. You could see in business meetings, committee members and leaders weren't coming. So I think people were discouraged with that style. They would come to the meeting, a business meeting, and then the people who were over committees weren't there to give reports or whatever. And so I think that had something to do with it too, that they thought this would be more efficient. And I think too, because we still have membership meetings where we are informed what was going on as well as when big decisions need to be made or financial issues need to be discussed and made, they're still a part of that process, so I think that way they're still involved but not with everything that they don't feel they need to be

Researcher: As a part of the constitution committee. How did you see your role in this transition?

Cheryl: Basically just making sure that the leadership was informing the congregation as to why they wanted to move to that model and being supportive of that or having discussions with people who had questions.

Researcher: What helped you understand the structure that was being proposed the most?

Cheryl: Just reading through what the Bible had to say about it and really giving it a lot of thought and prayer and trying not to, to go back and look at the way the ownership model worked at the previous church I attended because I didn't want that to influence how I felt it should work at First Baptist. So I tried to put all that aside and just study the scripture and see, you know, what they had.

Researcher: All right. So looking back on our meetings together as constitution committee what elements of designing the structure, do you remember being the most challenging or controversial?

Cheryl: Probably only discussed deacons and elders and could women be a part of it. That, or did everybody that was involved in certain things on committees? Would they be considered a deacon or an elder or what? I don't think there was a whole lot of discussion really about the role of elders and what we would do in those. I think um became more an issue of either what the deacons would do and who should be a deacon and things like that. I think everyone on the committee was pretty well informed as to what an elder's role was.

Researcher: So speaking of deacons on the survey that I just did last month, many in our congregation said they struggled to see the difference between deacons and elders. They were confused. A lot of them said they didn't know why do we even need to make this change? And they seem very, very similar. So both biblically and practically, they didn't necessarily see a difference. Why do you think that is? Why, why that confusion in our church?

Cheryl: Well, I think technically if you look, a lot of the qualifications are the same. So they think of it as there. There's so much, like the only differences one of them is apt to teach and the other doesn't have that listed. But I think because there's a lot of confusion as to whether, what is a deacon's role, what does a deacon really do that's different. And I, in my thoughts, do the elders, it's more handling the functions of the, of the congregation, like the committees did you know, overseeing things like that. Whereas not that it elders shouldn't do ministry. I don't mean it like that, but I think that's more of the role of the Deacon to be looking at for like say who hasn't been here? Well maybe we need to go visit and see if there's issues. We need to take care of him for him. Is there a sickness in the family or you know, or maybe they need to be the ones who do some home studies and things set up that and, and do those type things for teaching. I look at them as more providing more of a personal ministry to members of the congregation, whereas the elders in my thoughts are more taking care of business, so to speak. I think they still need to be able to do some of the things that deacons do because we're all supposed to do that. But I think that's where they struggle is because before deacons did all that stuff other than when we had business meetings and making decisions that way.

Researcher: Do you think we did a good job of communicating what an elder and a deacon was?

Cheryl: Well, as best you can because I really, it is very confusing. It is a hard thing to kind of separate what, what do deacons do different than what elders do? And I think it's that one little niche because we all should do those things. Why do we need both? But you do need both because then it's too much for, yeah, it's like asking the pastor to do it all. Yeah. It's too much. You can't effectively minister to your congregation and take care of all the other issues to news. So I think everybody has a role, but we all have a responsibility.

Researcher: One of the things we looked at in the structure in our, in our past, our church was fully democratic. We voted on just about everything in

business meetings. And one of the options that we had, we could have gone to full elder rule to where they would have decided everything. And we didn't take anything back to the church, but we decided to vote on some things still as a congregation. Now that we're two years removed from that, do you think we found a good balance or would you change something with that now?

Cheryl: Well, I seem to think we have a pretty good balance. I think that as time goes on, maybe some of the things that they feel like they want as a congregation to vote on, maybe they wouldn't feel the same because they see it's running smoothly and they see that the elders bring things to them and that are important. I don't think they, I really don't think they want a vote on every little thing the way we did in the past. I think they will grow more comfortable with the thought that I'm involved in the things that are truly important to the church.

Researcher: We also designed a structure that keeps a point person. Someone we call the pastor. Do you think that was a good idea or do you think that hurts the visibility of the other elders? Would you change something about that?

Cheryl: I don't think so. I think I'd leave it like that because I think you need one point person and that I would hope would keep people from running to this person or that person and I just don't think that would be a good thing. I think they need to have one person to take it to and that person take it to the elders, then it's less confusing. Who do I go to? And I think you can avoid some issues that wouldn't be a good for the church. They thought, well, I don't like the way this person does it? So I'll go to this elder instead. I've seen that happen. And that is not a good class either. And this way too, the elders can simply say, you need to take that to the pastor. You don't bring it to us. Okay. They may not like that response, but I think that's, that's the way it should be.

Researcher: We didn't anywhere in the designing of this structure set a definite number of elders. Do you think right now with five, two pastors on staff and then three lay elders, do you think we have enough?

Cheryl: I think for right now we do it with the size of our congregation and I think it's good not to have an even number. Okay.

Researcher: You like not having an even number just in case? Yeah. Because of your role on the constitution committee, you got a little bit of a preview of sorts

and you definitely had more time to review the idea than most of the congregation. Has it worked out as you anticipated?

Cheryl: I think it's worked out better. Now, I'm sure there's, I haven't heard anyone say negative things, but I'm sure it's worked out better than in my opinion and what I thought it would, but I'm sure there are probably still those who want the old way. They haven't gotten used to that yet and maybe some of those same people didn't come to the business meetings either, so I just think any time there's change you're going to have people who, who can't accept that they like it the way it used to be. I'm older. I understand that.

Researcher: Is there any way that you can think of that it turned out a little differently than you expected? Maybe you were sitting in a constitution committee meeting and you're imagining what this, this structure was going to be like and now that we've had it for two years, you didn't see something coming.

Cheryl: No. And maybe that's because I grew up in a church with elders. I kind of understand where some of the pitfalls are even when you have them and you will run into bumps in the road where when you have to get a new elder to replace somebody who's left or passed on, then you might hit some bumps because there are always people who say, I want to be an elder, why can't I be an elder? Because they don't view it as a servant position. They look at it as a hierarchy I guess, or makes them feel like they have more say, I don't know. I've, I've seen that happen a time or two when it's not always a pleasant thing to work through. So I think eventually there could be that. I would hope not. But yeah.

Researcher: Overall, do you think the change to elder leadership was number one good and number two, do you think it was necessary?

Cheryl: I think it was good and I really think it was necessary because like I said, I don't think the business meeting model worked very well. Or your attendance was low given the number you'd have in the congregation and committee people who were, who were to head up the committee weren't there to give a report or didn't send a report. So I just felt like it's not effective. It must not be very important in your mind or necessary when they aren't there in the business meeting model. But they don't want to participate the way they need to.

Researcher: Are you glad we made the change?

Cheryl: Yes.

Researcher: Anything else you'd like to add?

Cheryl: Well, I just I mean just to see as we move forward you know, right now I think we probably need more deacons and more clarification about how that works. But I don't know that we have the men yet willing who are qualified to do that, to serve in those roles. And because I don't think they have a distinct idea yet as to how that should function. But I think that will fall into place. The longer we have the eldership model and the, and the, and the membership meetings that we have, I think that will, it will eventually help clarify as we move forward. What does our congregation need and where, what role do the deacons have in that? What role do we as individuals have in land? I think that'll help clarify things more.

Researcher: Anything else?

Cheryl: No, no. I think things are going good.

Researcher: Thank you very much.

Cheryl: Sure. You're welcome.

INTERVIEW WITH GARY

Researcher: So I'm here with Gary Cooper who serves as one of our elders, but he was also on the constitution committee. So Gary, I gotta read this to you since we're doing a person to person interview. The research and what you're about to participate is designed to describe a churches transition to elder leadership. This research is being conducted by Josh Remy for purposes of dissertation research. In it, you will be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church transitioned to elder leadership and the current state of leadership in our church. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. I'll be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please don't let that affect your answers at any time. If you want me to strike something from the record or keep it anonymous, just let me know you understand and agree to participate.

Gary: I do.

Researcher: Also like I said, I'm going to skip a couple of these questions because they're very similar to what you already answered in the elder focus group. Let me ask you this. As a member of the Constitution Committee, how did you see your role in this transition at that time?

Gary: How did I see my role?

Researcher: Your, your role as a part of the constitution committee?

Gary: I guess I saw my role as being responsible for doing study and research to formulate my decisions with the intent of being biblically correct.

Researcher: What would you say as a part of that team helped you understand the structure that was being proposed the most?

Gary: When I started doing study, really in research on what the role of an elder is as compared to a deacon. That's really the impact.

Researcher: Looking back on our meetings together, and so you're gonna really have to think, I know it was two years ago, but what elements of designing the structure and planning for this do you remember being the most challenging or maybe even controversial? When did we get the most animated? What seemed to be the points that we talked about the most,

- Gary: The role of women serving in the congregation, the role of deacons or leadership roles.
- Researcher: We had talked about our congregation used to be fully democratic. We voted on most things at business meetings. We could have gone to full elder rule to where we took away the church vote altogether, but we decided to balance that and vote on some things as a congregation still. And so we're calling it elder leadership. Do you think we found a good balance now two years removed? Do you wish we would have gone one way or the other a little bit more?
- Gary: No, I, I think it's a good balance. So I think the congregation is, feels like that they have a voice in a representative voice. I think it made changes such as administrative changes, everything more efficient. And I think it's a good balance and I think the congregation as a whole feels that's a good balance.
- Researcher: We also designed a structure that kept a point person. Someone called the pastor looking back two years. Do you think that was a good idea or do you think it hurts the visibility of the other elders. Should we have balanced things out more? Would you change something about that now?
- Gary: No, I think, I think there has, I guess right now showed you have a point person, like every ship needs a captain
- Researcher: One of the things we did not design was we didn't put a definite number of elders. Do you think we have enough right now with three lay elders, two staff elders? Would you change something about that now? Do you think we have enough? Should we have required a number?
- Gary: I, I've, you know, I, I actually, we need to add elders. You know, cause you know, we've lost one elder and I think we need to replace that position to keep that, that balance. I think it's, you know, I think, I think we need another elder.
- Researcher: Do you think we should have formalized that in the constitution?
- Gary: I'm not sure. Did we formalize that? I don't know.
- Researcher: All we said was the, the lay elders had to outnumber the staff elders.

Gary: Right. I think we should, I think we should possibly have put a number in there that may be difficult as a number of, of staff elders change. But I think that balance always needs to be maintained.

Researcher: Because of your role in the constitution committee, you got a preview of sorts and a little bit more time to review this idea than the average a congregant did. So I think it's best to ask you guys this question. Did it work out the way you thought it would when we were sitting in that constitution committee meeting and you're imagining what this would look like? Did you, did it look, does it look like what you thought it would?

Gary: Actually worked out better than what I anticipated. Right.

Researcher: Okay. Can you illustrate that and how, how so?

Gary: Well I expected more questions, maybe more resistance to the changes. Um yeah, I guess my past history of have been totally congregational involvement to now an elder led congregational involvement. Um I know, yeah, it just went much better than what there was no resistance. Resistance was not there, which I had anticipated there would be resistance.

Researcher: Anything turn out differently from what you expected and how we operate or how the transition went,

Gary: I guess, operated very smoothly. Maybe it's more smoothly. And what it did was totally congregational. That, and what I'm saying, the congregation seems just to have complete confidence. Like it's almost swinging to the point. Okay. it's, you know, we're, we're confident there and they, it's going to be done. We don't, you don't need us to be involved. And it's almost, the pendulum is almost swinging. It was almost swinging too far, I think as far as a congregational involvement is,

Researcher: Oh, are you glad we made the change?

Gary: Yes. Yes.

Researcher: All the rest of these questions I think I already got from you in the elder focus group. So I think we're good. Thank you, Gary,

Gary: Very good

INTERVIEW WITH GREG

Researcher: Alright, I'm here with Greg LeHew. Greg helped transition to plurality of elders by being on the constitution committee. So Greg, I'm gonna read you this first. The research in which you're about to participate is designed to describe our churches transition to elder leadership. This research is being conducted by Josh Remy for purposes of dissertation research in it. You'll be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church transitioned to elder leadership and the current state of leadership in our church. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. I will be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please do not let that affect your answers at any time. If you want me to strike something from the record or keep it anonymous, just let me know. Do you understand and agree to participate.

Greg: Understood.

Researcher: Excellent. First question, what were your first impressions of the idea for First Baptist to transition to elder leadership?

Greg: I was a strong proponent for it.

Researcher: Had you come in contact with the concept, the idea before the constitution committee.

Greg: Let's see. So all of the previous, no, I take that back. All of the previous churches I ever attended with the exception of one, which was a church split and I was part of the, I guess the, the founding members of the new church all of the previous had always been democratically led or congregational led; only once and in one instance was ever elder led.

Researcher: And that's, but you are a strong proponent of it because of that?

Greg: No, I'm a strong proponent of it for a couple reasons. One, I think it's more biblical and two, because I think that when churches are democratically led, you basically are at the whim of people who really are not spiritually mature and they make a lot of decisions that are off based and are not biblical.

Researcher: It's been the general consensus that the transition, we'll talk about the results later, but the transition itself from the announcement up through the approval and the selection went pretty well. Would you agree?

Greg: I definitely would agree.

Researcher: Why do you think that is?

Greg: I don't know. I mean, I can guess, I think that maybe it's because I think that there's a strong leadership team at, at First Baptist. And so I think there was a certain amount of trust and so the transition, I think when people thought about it, I don't think it was a really much of the much of a difference in the end. But also I think, I mean, I don't know, part of me kind of thinks that most churches are getting the point where, you know, when it comes to business, the business end of a church, they don't want to really participate. And so there's a certain amount of apathy as well.

Researcher: How long have you been at First Baptist?

Greg: Let's see. We came here in 2012. February of 2012 this time around, but then we were also members from 2013. I'm sorry, 2003 to 2005.

Researcher: Anything that you can think of in the history of the church since you know, a little bit of it that might've made this the right time to change?

Greg: I don't know about the right time to change. Well I take that back. Yes. And so I think part of it also is I, I do believe that the Lord sent certain pastors along the way. I mean knowing what Jenny's told me through the history of the church, I hear a lot of the inner stuff, especially since her father was the pastor at one time. And of course there was a lot of the usual stuff that goes on in a church - the politics, the power all that. But I do believe I, I truly do believe that God used Greg Schaffer to kind of start the ball rolling to get that going. And I do believe that when Greg decided he was leaving, that he brought you here for a very specific reasons. And I think this is one of them as well

Researcher: As a part of the constitution committee. Then how did you see your role in this transition?

Greg: I saw my role primarily just to be to be another voice a double check in the process of transitioning, but I'll make sure like the other members that it was biblically based and decisions that we made

Researcher: You came in with some degree of understanding. But along the course of the, the constitution committee there, what helped you most understand the structure that was being proposed?

- Greg: Well, the, the, the biggest tool that was used to that I understood was you, I mean you explained it quite well. I do remember those meetings. And you were very, very specific and you used good you actually had some diagrams. You actually had visuals to better understand what your, what you were looking at for this church. And I mean from an understanding same point that helped immensely.
- Researcher: Looking back on those meetings together, you said you remember most of them. What elements of designing the structure, do you remember being the most challenging or even controversial? What, when did we get the most animated? What issues came up that you can remember?
- Greg: There weren't a lot, but the, I do know that the one that seemed to create the most the most anxious was lady deacons, female deacons. So that one certainly created probably the most discussion between the groups or the individuals. Most of it was pretty straight forward and most people agreed. I think there was I don't know if there was a little bit of reservation, but a little bit of part of the church discipline part of it I think was a little bit of a hesitation. I don't think there's disagreement. I just think a little bit of hesitation
- Researcher: In the survey we kind of found out that many people have struggled to see the difference between deacons and elders. Both biblically and practically. Why do you, why do you think there was this confusion in our church between deacons and elders?
- Greg: It's a good question. Maybe because, and this is just pure speculation, that's not based on anything that I've seen specifically have been made of these because you know, some of the deacons are some of the past deacons, the previous deacons, which would be more of the eldership. And I'm talking about like Ernie Bowman and, and Joe Dresbach. So maybe that's part of the, maybe the blurring of the lines. I think part of it is, is I'll admit it. I probably have done a horrible job really doing the function of deacon, you know, as the servant. So maybe they don't see as much of a contrast.
- Researcher: Do you think as a constitution committee that we did a good job communicating the difference between deacons and elders? Or do you think it's just a product of our, our history with deacons?
- Greg: I think overall it was well communicated, but I think, and I think it goes back to the topic we were talking about at the beginning. And that is why

do we see the need? And I think the need is, is primarily because people who don't understand it probably have a very low understanding of the church in general. And, and that could be even people who've been in attending that church for many years or decades.

Researcher: In the past, our congregation was fully democratic. We voted on most things at business meetings. One of our choices within, you know, looking at elder leadership, we could have gone to what we could call like elder rule that we decided as constitution committee to vote on some things still. Do you think we have found a good balance or would you change something or you, would you like to for us to continue to move or

Greg: I think I do believe that where, where it lies today is a good balance between the two. I think the, the part I think is just a good part of being a good servant leader is, is that having or enlisting input and some of that decision making to those who it impacts.

Researcher: Do you think our congregation would agree with your assessment that it's a good balance?

Greg: I don't know. I mean, I, I would, I would hope so, but, you know, I, I've never really discussed that with anybody else. I would hope so.

Researcher: Something else that we designed in the structure was we kept a point person someone called the pastor. Do you think reflecting on that, that that was a good idea or do you think that hurts the visibility of the other elders where you changed something about that decision now?

Greg: I don't think I would change anything because I do believe that there does need to be some sort of hierarchy. But I think, I don't know, maybe the biggest, I really think the biggest issue there is, is that people have in their heads, just based on what they've expected or what they've seen or growing up in is that the pastor is the paid position and therefore they are the leader. Right, wrong or indifferent. And most of the time it's wrong.

Researcher: Do you think there's anything we can do about that to change that perception?

Greg: I always think that there's always ways to, to counter that I don't know that I have a solution.

Researcher: When designing this, we did not set a definite number of elders. Right now we have three elders and then one part time staffer and then one full

time staff. Do you think we have enough elders? Would you change something about that now?

Greg: I wouldn't necessarily change the number just to change the number. No. Now would, would there be strength in numbers from the standpoint of, of shouldering responsibilities? Sure. Absolutely. But do I think that we need more just for the sake of numbers and now.

Researcher: Okay. Well said. Because of your role on the constitution committee, you got kind of a preview and a more time really to review the idea than most people did. So I think it's a good to ask you guys this question. Has it worked out as you anticipated?

Greg: Yes, for the most part, yeah, I do. I do believe it has. I think that the inner workings, and it's not to be secretive or you know, under the radar, but the reality is I think that the majority of the decisions that need to be made should be made by those who are spiritually mature. Just like a parent makes most of the decisions in the family.

Researcher: Anything that you can point to that's been different. Imagine, imagine yourself in one of those constitution meetings and you're picturing what the structure is going to operate like. But now it's just, Oh, I didn't see that coming or anything surprise you.

Greg: No, nothing comes to my mind.

Researcher: Overall then couple of closing questions. Do you think this change to elder leadership was number one good. And then number two, do you think it was necessary?

Greg: I do think it was good cause anytime you do something more biblical than I think, then it's a good thing. And necessary only because if, if it's, if it's biblically based and it's always a good decision. But do I think the old church system worked as far as the function of the church overall? Yes. But I mean, there's always a, there's always little things that are always challenges.

Researcher: You glad we made the change?

Greg: Yes, absolutely.

Researcher: Anything else you'd like to add? And you can think about it like this. Is there something else that you would tell another church considering this change?

Greg: I guess the only, the only thing I would say for another church, it would be to truly understand the men that you are, you're, you're electing or nominating or voting to put in those positions. And, and I want to say that because it's a reality, most of the modern nature too is you only have a very superficial or surface level understanding of who people really are. It's true. Yes.

Researcher: Would you recommend it for a church like ours? Southern Baptist churches that were congregational in nature?

Greg: I would personally recommend it for all churches. Okay.

Researcher: Great. Anything else to add?

Greg: No, that's all I got.

INTERVIEW WITH ROBIN

Researcher: Alright. I'm here with Robin Patrick, who was a member of our constitution committee that helped in the transition to a plurality of elders. Robin, the research in which you're about to participate is designed to describe our churches transitioned to elder leadership. This research is being conducted by Josh Remy for purposes of dissertation research. In this research, you will be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church transitioned to elder leadership and the current state of leadership in the church. Participation in this study is totally voluntary. You're free to withdraw from the study at any time. I'll be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please do not let that affect your answers at any time. If you want me to strike something from the record or keep it anonymous, just let me know. Do you understand and agree to participate?

Robin: I understand.

Researcher: All right, let's roll then. What were your first impressions of the idea for First Baptist Church Waverly to transition to elder leadership?

Robin: First impression. I thought it was a good idea. It was definitely something new to me because I'd never been part of a church that really was elder led. So it was a new concept but yet something that I was very interested in and thought it was a good direction for the church to go.

Researcher: You said it was a new idea, had you interacted with it at all before being in the Constitution Committee? Even at church?

Robin: No.

Researcher: No reference point for it at all? This was very new?

Robin: Very new.

Researcher: It's the general consensus that the entire transition of this went very well. Speaking specifically of transition, not necessarily results. This, we're still talking about that. Would you agree with that assessment?

Robin: I would agree.

Researcher: Why do you think that is? Why do you think it went well?

Robin: I think it went well because the committee met, we went through a lot of scripture. We went through a lot of discussion and kind of probably or you were prepared to address questions and things that we kind of foresaw was going to be some issues and concerns. So I think the committee helped prepare for that initial bringing it before the church.

Researcher: Um how long have you guys gone to First Baptist?

Robin: Probably 18 years.

Researcher: 18 years. So anything in that brief history that you think made this the right time for the change? I mean, why not do it 15 years ago? Is it just because I happened to come and bring it up or...

Robin: Probably just because you just brought it up? Yeah. I mean I think that had you not, things would've kept going the way they've always been going.

Researcher: As a member of the Constitution Committee, how did you see your role in this transition?

Robin: How did I see my role? I saw my role in, as, as part of a team to kind of research what this was going to look like, what it was going to look like for our church and kind of plan, research and plan what this was, how this was going to be proposed to church, you know, and all those types of things.

Researcher: What would you say helped you the most understand the structure that was being proposed?

Robin: Probably for me personally being on the committee, probably more so than if I was not on the committee,

Researcher: I guess I should say because you were on the committee.

Robin: I really dug into scripture you know, Lane and I had a lot of conversations about this

Researcher: Analytical husband.

Robin: Yeah, exactly. So that was a good thing, you know, being on the committee I dug into scripture to see how exactly I did feel about it.

Researcher: Yeah. With it being a new idea or a new concept, looking back on our meetings together. And so this is one of the things you can reference that old agenda there. When we first started talking about elders structure, what elements of designing the structure do you remember being the most challenging or even controversial? Does anything come to mind where we had a little more animated discussion or maybe even had some disagreement that you remember?

Robin: I mean, one of the big points I remember is women being elders. That was something that I struggled with and then felt like there was some real strong opinions on and there was some differing opinions. So that was one of the things that, and to be truthful, I, I don't have an issue with women being elders, but it was not a topic. There were some strong people that were, it wasn't a make or break deal for me. And there was, I knew there was people that were completely opposed to it. And so,

Researcher: Well even that after that, I remember it was women deacons then.

Robin: Yeah. With the redefining that. Exactly.

Researcher: Many in our church according to the surveys struggled to see the difference between deacons and elders. Both biblically and practically. Why do you think there's such a confusion there?

Robin: I do think, you know, when you brought this topic back, Other than our meetings being different, I don't think that it's very obvious. I'll be honest, Lane and I had to think who are our elders, you know they aren't super visible and it's not something, they're kind of behind the scenes and that's okay. But I don't know that people see a big difference other than our meeting structure. But I'd lost track on what the question was.

Researcher: That a lot of people are confused on the difference between deacons and elders, both biblically and practically. So

Robin: Biblically. Yeah, maybe that's just an area that needs discussed more. But practically it's probably because they're really not seeing a big difference.

Researcher: Follow up, did you think we did a good job communicating it or is it just a product of our history with deacons?

Robin: I think we did good job communicating it at the beginning, but I don't think that it's something that's talked about very much after that, you know. But I do think in the beginning it was discussed like, oh, somebody

new that just came to church here. Recently I probably wouldn't know who the elders are. Maybe, you know, maybe it's in our bulletin, but I don't always read the bulletin and not sure it's in it. And you know, so how would you know who the elders are and yeah, I don't know if that's that important or not.

Researcher: In the past our congregation was fully democratic. We voted on most things. We could have, if you remember part of the discussion, we could have gone to full elder rule I think is what we called it but we decided to vote on some things still as a congregation to, to try to find a balance there. Do you think we found a good balance or would you change something now after two years?

Robin: I think we've found a good balance. Yeah, definitely.

Researcher: Do you think members of the congregation would agree?

Robin: I think so. I've not heard anything negative. Okay. I know some of the meetings in the past, you know, I was thinking that this morning before coming here, that some of those meetings were crazy people making decisions that really weren't involved in making decisions about things they knew nothing about. So, yeah, I liked, I liked the structure. It's, you know lost my train of thought again, but

Researcher: As a, just as a member, not a constitution committee person, but do you feel you still have a say on things?

Robin: Yes. Absolutely. Yup.

Researcher: Another thing that we designed about this structure is that it kept a point person, somebody we refer to as the pastor. Do you think again, after two years that that was a good idea or do you think it hurts the visibility of the other elders? Would you change anything about that part or the structure now

Robin: I wouldn't change it and I think it's perfectly fine and I don't think that's what's preventing maybe the visibility of the elders.

Researcher: Do you think we have enough elders? Would you change something about that now? We didn't really require a number. If you remember, we just said the, the lay elders have to outnumber staff elders. So we are at the bare minimum of that. Right. Do you think it's enough or...

Robin: I mean, it seems to be enough because I'm not seeing any issues, so I'm assuming they're handling the load and decisions are being made and everything seems to be operating smoothly. So I assume not an issue.

Researcher: Because of your role on the constitution committee, you got a preview of sorts and definitely more time. Probably spent a lot more time reviewing the idea than the average member. So this is a good question to ask you guys. Has it worked out how you anticipated?

Robin: I think so.

Researcher: Is it pretty much what you expected? Yes. Any ways that you could say that it's been different?

Robin: Different? How different than what I expected?

Researcher: Anything different than when you're sitting, when you were sitting in this very room and the constitution committee and you're imagining this taking place now that you've been in this for two years, is there anything that kinda surprised you?

Robin: Well, okay. Surprises me that, you know, I expected that there'd be this team of elders that just run the church and I don't feel that, I don't feel like there's this group of elders that are calling all shots and controlling everything. They are, but it's not how I envisioned it was going to be.

Researcher: You felt like it was going to be a little more heavy handed and it's not. Is that what you're saying?

Robin: Yeah. That's what I thought in my mind. It was just what I imagine, but, okay. And does not appear to be that way to me now.

Researcher: Do you think this change to elder leadership was good, number one, and then second, do you think it was necessary?

Robin: Uh I think it was good. Yes. I think it was necessary. Both? Yes.

Researcher: Okay. Yes to both. Are you glad we made the change?

Robin: Yes.

Researcher: Anything else you'd like to add just in general from this process? Being in pretty intimate part of it? Think about it like this, I guess if, is there

something that you would tell another church that was considering this change?

Robin: I don't know. You know, if another church was having reservations about it, I mean, I would definitely speak about it on a positive note that it, you know, I think a lot of people get concerned that you, it is just going to be a group of people running the church. And that's not, you know, it's not really the intended structure. And it can work. Not that, you know, I mean that we've successfully, I still feel very much like I have a voice in this church. Right. You know, and so can you have an elder led church and still be very involved in the important aspects of the church or, you know, have a say how, you know, have a voice, whatever, you know, that you can. Okay.

Researcher: Would you recommend it for churches like ours, especially SBC churches?

Robin: I would. Yep.

Researcher: Anything else to add?

Robin: No, not really.

Researcher: Well, thank you for your time.

INTERVIEW WITH TERESA

Researcher: Here with Teresa Caldwell. She was a member of the constitution committee that helped in this transition to elder leadership among other things in the constitution. Teresa, I'm going to read this for you. The research in which you're about to participate is designed to describe our churches transitioned to elder leadership, and this research is being conducted by Joshua Remy for purposes of dissertation research. In this, you will be asked multiple questions regarding your opinions on the history of the church transition to elder leadership, current state of leadership in our church. Participation in this study is totally voluntary. You're free to withdrawal at any time. I'll be recording for the purpose of transcription. Please do not let that affect your answers at any time. If you want me to strike something from the record or keep it anonymous, just let me know. Do you understand and agree to participate?

Teresa: Yes.

Researcher: All right, so let me ask you first. What were your first impressions of the idea of First Baptist church transitioning to elder leadership?

Teresa: I was interested. I was curious. I was not opposed, but I didn't completely understand the concept.

Researcher: The first time you heard about it was probably a constitution committee meeting, right?

Teresa: Yes.

Researcher: I think, I think we've all agreed so far that the entire transition seemed to go very well. We'll talk about the results and stuff later, but just during that transition period it seemed to go very smoothly. Would you agree?

Teresa: Yes, I agree.

Researcher: Why do you think that is?

Teresa: I think we prepared the congregation with information. I think the people presenting the information were trustworthy. The congregation trusted the ones making the decision. And I think it was a, it was a valid idea.

Researcher: Do you think there's anything about our history that made this the right time to make the change? I mean, why didn't this happen 20-30 years ago?

Teresa: I think the structure or the basic structure of the church has always been pastor and deacons, and I think it was just a matter of the people were not really aware or didn't think about an elder led church because of the history of the Baptist, Southern Baptist churches.

Researcher: How did you see your role in this transition as a member of the constitution committee that was helping to build this structure? Again, among other things, we changed several things in that constitution, but this specifically, how did you see your role?

Teresa: I felt my role was to try to understand, to try to make sure that I represented the congregation and that it was a change that was based in the Bible and that it was a change that our congregation could accept.

Researcher: What early on helped you understand most of the structure that was being proposed?

Teresa: I really thought that the, the readings that you gave us, the, the background information on elders, the references in the Bible to elders, the interpretations of the Bible by different authors concerning elders. I thought that that was very helpful to me.

Researcher: Did it help to, to have conflicting views or did that confuse you?

Teresa: Conflicting views don't bother me. I just want to make sure that what we're doing is something that the majority of folks can accept

Researcher: Looking back on our meetings together as constitution and many we met a number of times. And I know you said you might struggle to remember, cause that was over two years ago now. What elements of designing the structure do you remember sticking out being the most challenging or the most controversial, what we talked about the most, and again, they're there in front of you on that list if you need to reference them. There's, there's some from that agenda there.

Teresa: I think just the fact that we were changing from deacons to elders and then, and trying to discern the difference between what a deacon does and what an elder does. And I think the discussions we had, I didn't feel anybody was negative. It was all good discussion and pointed to, you

know, what's the best way to handle this? What's the best way to have our church be more biblical?

Researcher: Interesting that you bring up the difference between deacons and elders. Many on the survey that I did struggled with that and still struggle with that. That difference both biblically and practically what they actually do. Why do you think that is? Why do you think that's such a point of confusion?

Teresa: I think a lot of times our deacons in the past have basically functioned as elders and I, so I think it's sometimes it's hard to discern for the people who really are not involved in church leadership. I think sometimes it is difficult to understand the roles of those in the leadership positions.

Researcher: So you think we did a, we didn't do a good job communicating that or you think it's just a product of our history with deacons?

Teresa: Well I think, I think we did it. I think we did an excellent job communicating it. What people understand is how much time they invest in trying to understand it to be honest with you.

Researcher: What do you think we can do to clear that up now? If it's still an area of confusion, what could we do to, to distinguish those two roles a little bit more?

Teresa: I really don't know. I, I would say that just on a periodic basis, we might do something that has a deacon focus and do something at a different time that has an elder focus that would, would highlight some of the, the jobs that they do. Jobs is not a right word, but it would highlight some of the duties and the things that they are responsible for. And if you bring that to the forefront of that to the congregation, let's say, you know, you have a deacon Sunday, the deacons have done this, this and this this year.

Researcher: That's good. That's a good idea. In the past, our congregation here, as are many Southern Baptist churches, was fully democratic. We voted on most things at business meetings. Now we could have, in our discussion go on to full elder rule, which would have been the opposite end of the spectrum where we would've had elders and they make all the decisions, but we decided to vote on some things still as a congregation. Do you think we found a good balance or would you change something now?

Teresa: I think we found a good balance. With that said, I would say that we need to make sure that we communicate the decisions that are made by the elders on their own. Maybe in our quarterly meetings, you know, just it, you don't have, not everything but the highlight some of the decisions that the elders have made you do that some, but maybe highlight them in another, like in a newsletter or something.

Researcher: How do you think the congregation feels? Do you think they feel we found a good balance or are you alluding to that when you talk about the, the need for information?

Teresa: I've not really discussed it with too many people. I know there are couple of people that I think were not really in favor of it but voted for it anyway. I don't think they see a whole lot of difference in the way our church functions and then probably there's not as much differences as there would have been if the deacons hadn't already been doing some of the things that the elders do. I don't think, I think the general person in the congregation probably doesn't realize that we're elder led, to be honest.

Researcher: We also designed a, a structure that kept a point person, somebody called the pastor. Do you think that was a good idea?

Teresa: Yes.

Researcher: Do you think it hurts the visibility of the other elders?

Teresa: No, I think that, I think in a church of... I think one of the reasons that our church functions well is because we know and trust those in leadership positions. I think, you know, in a great big church, you don't know your elders. You don't, the only person you know knows your pastor I think because you see them every Sunday. So yes, I think the point person still needs to be the pastor.

Researcher: Anything you'd change about that now? Two years later,

Teresa: No.

Researcher: Do you think we have enough elders and would you change something about that? We have five total, including me.

Teresa: Yeah. I think that's plenty for our size church.

Researcher: So you would think it's a good balance?

Teresa: Yes.

Researcher: Because of your role, you got a preview of sorts and more time to review this idea. More time to wrestle with it. Let's be honest, you've probably spent more than most wrestling with this. So I like asking this question to you guys. Has it worked out as you anticipated?

Teresa: Yes.

Researcher: For the most part, yes?

Teresa: For the most part, yes.

Researcher: Any ways you can highlight that it's been different that you didn't see this happening or didn't expect this?

Teresa: No, because I think I had, because of our Constitution Committee, I think I had a really good understanding of what was going to happen and how it was going to work.

Researcher: Overall, do you think this change to elder leadership was good, number one and two, do you think it was necessary?

Teresa: I think it was good because I think it puts us more in line with what the Bible says. As far as necessary, I don't think it was absolutely essential necessary, but I think it was a, it was a good move and a good time to do it. I think any church is as good as the people that they have in leadership positions. And I think we're very fortunate to have good leadership. And I think that's what has made the difference.

Researcher: We've talked about that with a couple other people that you change out the people who actually became elders and this whole thing's a disaster. It doesn't matter how much work we did in the constitution committee.

Teresa: Exactly.

Researcher: Are you glad we made the change?

Teresa: Yes, I think it's fine.

Researcher: Anything else you'd like to add? And you can think about it this way, is there something you'd like to tell another church considering this change?

Would you recommend it for another SBC church? You know, those kinds of things.

Teresa: I would recommend it for any church, but I think the background work needs to be done. I think you need to have a good unity in your church to start with. And I think you need to make sure that those in the church, the congregation understands exactly what's, and I think we tried to do that.

Researcher: Anything else?

Teresa: Nope, I'm good.

Researcher: Yes, you are.

APPENDIX 9

ELDER FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Church Transition to a Plurality of Elders: A Case Study

Elders Focus Group Protocol

The follow is a semi-structured interview protocol for an interview with the men that were nominated and confirmed as elders after the church voted to transition its government to elder led. Much of this protocol is based on topics that surfaced in the precedent literature and the congregational survey but the interview was administered before these elders knew the results of the survey. This research method will highlight the following stages mentioned in Chapter 3, Research Methodology: History, Announcement, Selection, and Results.

What were your first impressions of the idea for FBC to transition to elder-leadership?

- Was there anything in your past that affected your view of elder-leadership?
- Was there anything about the new pastor that affected your view of this idea?

All of you were deacons previously, correct? For how long?

What did being a deacon here mean?

- Do you believe the board of deacons here at FBC previously operated like elders?
- How were they similar? How were they different?

How did we do with the process of introducing the idea to the church? Which part do you think made the most difference?

Were there any areas of controversy in this transition? If you had to point to a challenging aspect of this, what would it be?

The entire transition of this went very well at our church. Agree? Why do you think that is?

We opened the nominations up to the church membership and obviously, each of you were nominated. Why do you think you were nominated?

Is there anything about the nomination process that you wish we would have done differently?

What should we look for in new candidates and how do we make certain we are open to new elders?

Upon your confirmation, how did you feel? How did you wife and/or family process the new role?

Do you feel you were adequately trained and equipped to do this new role? What was missing initially? What skills or knowledge do you think you still need?

We have designed a structure that maintains a “point person,” a lead pastor. What has been good about that and what has been challenging about that?

We have designed a structure that maintains congregational authority through voting on several issues and decisions. What has been good about that and what has been challenging about that?

All of you have gone to FBC for a significant number of years... how long? Given your history here, are you surprised at the ease of this transition? Why or why not? Any particular events make you think we were ready or not ready for such a change?

Overall, how do you think things are going as a result of this transition? Do you think it was the right move? What do we need to do differently and continue to grow in?

Anything else you want to note would tell another church that was considering this transition?

APPENDIX 10

ELDER FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

- Researcher: I'm here with Barry Tarlton, Gary Towler, Val Francis and Gary Cooper, all elders of First Baptist church. And we're gonna talk through the transition that First Baptist made to a plurality of elders. So guys my first question for you, what were your first impressions of the idea for FBC to transition to elder leadership whenever it was that you first heard about it? What, what went through your mind? First of all, did you roll your eyes? Did you, you think it was a good idea? What were your thoughts?
- Towler: I thought I had questions. I just didn't know really for sure exactly what all that encompassed.
- Francis: I have looked at it for years. Being a former church that had elders and I talked to Gary Pack, a former pastor, about it numerous times and studied scripture and it was plain as could be that the plurality of elders was how the New Testament Church was to be functioning and be forming. Yeah,
- Tarlton: I'd say I was excited about it just because for a long time, you know, I think I've had discussions with other people and reading the scriptures just that it's, to Val's point that, you know, that was what I understood scripture was more aligned with a plurality of elders, leaders, overseers or whatever versus one person running the ship or guiding.
- Cooper: My first concern was, was change... changing from tradition. And what would that, you know, would that be accepted by the congregation? And I did not really understand the biblical function of elders.
- Researcher: Do you guys, would you say there was anything in your past that affected your view of elder leadership? Val already mentioned the fact that he had been in a church, that was a Church of Christ, right?
- Francis: Correct.
- Researcher: Uh that had elders. Anything in the rest of you guys, you (Cooper), you interact with lots of churches?

Cooper: Yup. Some of the concern was that there are some churches basically that quote are pastor owned. I could name some. The building was owned by the pastor or the family. So basically there's no doubt about it. You control the church. And so, so one of my questions my already on was basically we've had tradition of a congregation, you know, being controlled with the congregation. Was it, was that quote control being shifted from the congregation to a small group? Bailey chapel church is a good example of that.

Researcher: Yeah. And they're struggling now that because of that. So yours was really a question of, of authority of too few people having authority now. Okay. Because of what you had seen in other churches. Okay. Either you guys, anything in your past that you could identify?

Towler: I was in a church of Christ early on as a young person and remember elders and I would concur with Gary's thoughts. It's just after here at a deacon led church here for so long. Just my concerns were, first it was biblical. Second that, you know, it was interpreted and clearly communicated to our congregation that point because I had reservations about telling the congregation that we're now elders, so we may be making a few more decisions forthcoming.

Francis: Well, my observation being, coming from the church prior here that was not elder led, was that if men did not have the proper attitude towards submission to be fit to be an elder, then it became an issue of power and it really could become a problem. And there's research that I'd done at churches that were elders were servants, you know, all the difference in the world being functional and being good,

Tarlton: I guess go into something in the past, you know, at our church when we were pastor-less for a period of time that was through some turmoil. Then we lost our associate pastor then not long after that we lost our pastor. And but so those were hard times. But I thought that we grew and I think it helped the, it helped me see that the church is not the pastor. And it's about everyone coming together and working for a common goal and you know, you know, in unity for a common purpose. And that's kind of what excited me about going to a plurality of elders because I think so many people you know, across America and in our church even, you have this mindset that, you know, that's the pastor's job. That's the youth pastor's job. That's their job and this concept that well wait, no, we, it's all our jobs, you know. And I thought kind of a step towards plurality of elders would help hopefully open people's mind to the fact that, wait, that guy doesn't have a degree in

seminary. But he is, you know, on mission for Christ. What makes me any different according to scripture. There isn't a difference. They are, we're all on mission for Christ. So that's why I was kind of excited about.

Researcher: Excellent. Was there anything about the new pastor that affected your view of this idea? I mean, let's be honest, I'm the one that brought this to the table. Was there anything about me that made you kind of go, whoa or lean in... either way?

Francis: I don't know about lean in to be the right word, but the way you brought it to us, the way you handle it from a biblical presentation to being inclusive with the entire congregation, make sure that everyone understood what our motives were, what it was to be, the fact that it was still going to have congregational input. I believe that really had a big effect on our success.

Cooper: Yeah, I think, I think the process was very good. I think the process is very good. We had a committee, we had lot of discussion, a lot of research. You gave us a lot of material to read and study. It was it was discussed some more for us, you know, actually presented. So, I think the process was good. Everyone had the opportunity to be informed and make comments and to provide input. So I know, I don't think anyone felt like that it was being pressured any,

Tarlton: I'm sure it didn't hurt too your history being here that you grew up here and you grew up here together. But for me, to be honest, it didn't have a whole lot of uh weight in the matter. I guess from my standpoint, I think a lot of it was the way it was handled. And the fact that you brought it up slowly, you know, brought up, first of all the reasons why and why we wanted to do this, but it still wasn't we're going to do it. It's like, hey, start thinking, praying about this, consider this. Right. And just that whole process,

Cooper: I think, I think the process was real key. And of course you had a part to play in that, the way you orchestrated that. But you can think of some past pastors if they would have tried to make some of it. Well, some pastors tried to do some things and it was not well received.

Researcher: And you think that's because of the process or because of the person?

Towler: Both the level of trust that came with the process and knowing who you are.

Researcher: So they kind of, the trust wasn't just in the person. It was that, yeah. It wasn't being rammed down your throat. Right?

Cooper: Yeah, you are. You're a part of us, you're family, your family was here and you grew up here um you had a lot at stake. So I think the other process is great. Your influence on that process, there was also an impact.

Researcher: Kind of switching gears just a little, all of you were deacons previously, correct? When we first brought this up Barry, how long had you been a deacon? I'm gonna ask each of you too.

Tarlton: I don't know.

Researcher: Long time.

Tarlton: Yeah.

Researcher: More than 10 years. Do you think?

Tarlton: I don't know that more than ten years

Cooper: I'd bet. You were too

Tarlton: I can't remember when I became a Deacon... Was that Pack?

Researcher: Yeah. So that was 10 years then. It was at least 10 years. Gary, you too Towler, 30, 20, 30. All of you've been deacons for decades. Then what did being a deacon here mean?

Towler: In touch with our congregation?

Cooper: Yes. We were never quote a Deacon Board. It really wasn't administrative. It was pastors used the deacons as a sounding board. And that, you know, we throughout the years when we were servants we did a family ministry plan visitation just staying in touch with the congregation and trying to assist the pastor anyway that we could.

Tarlton: Yeah. I do remember that was something Cooper I think you explicitly brought up a lot of times into how can we serve you? How can we help the pastor at the time?

Francis: I think with time people in the congregation realized or did not realize it in some ways the deacons function almost in the role of an elder in some

ways. Whether the congregation knew it or not as they looked toward the deacon, but do what Gary had to say. I then we helped the pastor, we did, we visited, we did those kinds of things.

Researcher: Now do the, I'm, I'm curious cause I had that as kind of a prompt here. Do the rest of you agree with what Val just said? Was there some way in which the deacons did function as elders here or not? And then let me just go ahead and let me just go ahead and flush out the next one. How were they similar? How are they different?

Cooper: When we're a sounding board for the pastors, which, which helped them make decisions.

Francis: Okay, here's what sticks in my mind. A lot of times at a business meeting or something would come up presented from a committee or from the pastor himself. You hear someone in the congregation say, had the deacons talked about this yet? Which to me would be more functioning more as an elder.

Tarlton: That's actually what came to my mind too is the fact that oftentimes it came in business meeting things came as recommendations from the deacons or getting to or recommending this set of recommendations that come from the deacons. I think in that way it looks similar.

Researcher: Any thoughts on how they were different? How they are different?

Towler: It's definitely different in the sense that we're, you know, more responsible for decision making. I think before everything was voted on and we were very methodical about that and when he'd run this by the congregation. Not that we've made a lot of decisions as far as elders, but I think we have the ability to do that now.

Cooper: We found we functioned as an advisory committee rather than decision making.

Francis: Yeah, I think we're growing the idea of understanding that we're in the idea of the pastoral care role or the idea of the teaching and the preaching or maybe being an extension of what we would view historically as the role of the pastor and that's sort of the role we're all in.

Tarlton: I think for me personally, when we started, so we started studying what it truly meant to be kind of an elder and just the concept of an overseer or under shepherd. A kind of the responsibility aspect I think Gary brought

up to me has been different. Where I see our role as more, like I said, as a shepherd and you know. Whereas as a deacon we are more servants where you still obviously are, you know, servants, but also feel a responsibility to some degree to the congregation.

Researcher: All of you seem to mention that you thought the process went well and you all kind of said it ran smoothly. Which part do you think made the most difference? Would you all agree with it? Was it was time, was there, were there, is there something else, you all mentioned, the fact that you had at time. Were there other aspects of introducing this idea to the church that you think made it go well?

Tarlton: I think one thing is definitely the, the gradualness of it kind of gradually introducing the topic and letting people start first of all, when the ideas start considering it as a possibility and then think about it, come up with questions and have those questions answered. And then I think also just presenting the biblical side of it, you know, here's what we said was crucial. Absolutely. So the time for people, cause I know locked in, like you said, you even Gary, you said change and that's how a lot of people are, right? Red flags you up or changing something, you know, I should be concerned about this. And so giving that time instead of saying, hey, we're going to make a change. Say, Hey, just start considering this, and then let's look at the scripture and say, easing people into that. That change in with a clear understanding of why the changes.

Francis: I think as time went on, it was presented in a way it was people had a, which is very necessary and change is that people felt like they had some ownership in the process itself. It was presented in a way that people could question, people could talk and Josh presented it biblically. And this church is always wanting to be biblically based on who we, who we are. And it was presented to us from the Bible and it's almost like, well, yes, this is absolutely what we should do. Do we have all the answers? No, but this is what we should do. So it was a smooth transition I think because of that.

Cooper: And I think timing is very critical. You know, people didn't feel pressured or rushed.

Tarlton: One other aspect I think too as you mentioned, you, many of us, we had been deacons for a long time and I'm with him at times. I think as you said that the deacons were going, was seen similar to elders, right? And so that's kind of closest thing. Maybe they hadn't had an understanding to but

there's never been any kind of even the slightest hint of a power grab or abusive power for the decades that I've been here before I was a deacon. And even as a deacon, we just, I never saw those. There's never a power struggle. And so I don't think that as some people hinted at other churches, we have seen those kinds of things. People were afraid of that happening in an eldership. I'd never think that there's any concern about that here.

Francis: Some churches structure their elders: first elder, second elders... don't think that would work here.

Researcher: I'm going to combine this with another question. You do think structure, Val, played a part. If we had structured this a little differently? You don't think it would have been received as well?

Francis: Probably not. If it would have been looked at as because this church has been established for awhile and the people, like Barry is an example, grew up here. We saw Barry grow up, the young man take a wife and has children and make a commitment to Christ can be teaching his children Christ, the teachings of Christ. So I think the fact that people knew each other well and there was already a role of servanthood made, the structure, the change of structure, easier for people to adhere to.

Cooper: I think in structure, there's one, one key, very important that the composition of the elders is that the non-staff elders who are in the majority, I think that is like, that's the real key. I know another church right now. It's really struggling with that issue. You know, the, the elders are just spending money and going this way and people are saying why, why, why, you know and, and many of them are family. It's huge. It's a huge Southern Baptist church and, and they're, you know, they're all a bunch of family.

Researcher: Sounds like more of an oligarchy instead of an eldership. You know, just a ruling class. Anything else about the, would you guys agree that the transition went well? Anybody want to push back on that or any other reason why you think that was anything to add to that?

Tarlton: You say the transition was easy. I think it was easier going to elders than it is to change the style of music and worship.

Researcher: It seems like it. Yeah. Well I, I'm not supposed to interject here, but I think that's because there's a biblical basis for this, right? Yeah. Whereas in

these other decisions that we have, there's nothing about what color the carpet should be.

Tarlton: There's a process to explaining there.

Francis: And how you handle those things as we well know makes all the difference.

Cooper: All those are factors.

Towler: Back to trust. You mentioned throwing in stuff, but it was trust and you have a lot of trust there and you, you brought it in for months before we actually had to thinking about this. We're looking at this and it gave us the opportunity to research it before you presented it.

Researcher: Now, if you, would you say there were any areas of controversy in this transition? If you had to point to a challenging aspect of this, what would it be? Would you say, I was a little worried about this or I heard some, you know, grumbling about this. Was there any element of controversy that you can think of?

Francis: I heard no grumbling. If there was any concern at all, I was concerned that I had serving in this role.

Researcher: For Your own person. Yeah. Leave that one for later. Yeah, I got you. Anybody else? Any, any?

Cooper: I guess the only, I'm still not sure that the deacons know... The deacons really understand the roles that we're trying to. Okay. I guess if I had the question about that transition, that's one of,

Researcher: I think that was the question during the process and kind of still remains.

Tarlton: I think if there was any concern, it's just a clarification of the roles to people but, there's no real, I didn't have any like major concerns. Any concerns really.

Researcher: All right. As far as nominations go, once this was voted on, it was August 13th, 2017 and it passed and we changed the constitution and bylaws and we officially became a, an elder led church. We took a month to have people pray about and nominate elders. We opened up nominations for the church membership and obviously each of you are nominated. I'm going to ask you a very difficult question now, but I want you to be honest and I

know all of you are humble and you don't have to give the whole false humility thing. But why do you think you were nominated? Why do you think so many people wrote your name down? If you had to step back and honestly consider that,

Tarlton: Can we answer for other people?

Researcher: Well, okay. Why did the guys in this room get nominated? We'll just leave it very general. So that's inclusive of yourself and everybody else.

Towler: Trust. That comes back to the word trust. Again, I hate to keep using that.

Tarlton: No, I mean that was what was coming to my mind. It was a trust built over years of...

Cooper: Longevity,

Tarlton: Yeah, longevity of committed service and humility. I think a lot of it, I mean, to what my point earlier that, you know, no one I don't think there was any hint of people worrying about, you know, me and those elders are already take over into x, y, z because the people that they nominated, they knew, you knew that they didn't have that power hungry attitude. It wasn't about that at all.

Francis: Demonstrated observation of looking at people's lives and seeing where they've been, how they serve, how they love... is, is two and two is four. What's their character like in the business world or in the outside or they looked at and people just had the right attitude that being an elder means being a servant. Can we name one person that I felt like should have been or would have been an elder did you? All we all talking about would have been Ernie, but I think he likely could see as plain as day too. But for some reason he couldn't make the crossover.

Researcher: Well he, he declined. He just, he felt himself more of a deacon and wanted to serve didn't want to be an authority. But yeah, he was, his name was written down quite a bit, quite a few times.

Tarlton: And again, it goes back to longevity,

Researcher: Longevity and trust. Yeah. Is there anything about the nomination process that you guys wish we would've done differently? Do you think there was enough time? It was a one month, you know, that night that we voted in,

we had people write down nominations and then pray over those nominations for about a month before that next membership meeting.

Cooper: I think that was adequate.

Researcher: Uh what should we look for in new candidates and how do we make certain we're open to new elders?

Cooper: We should constantly review the biblical standards for an elder.

Francis: Trust more trust and longevity.

Towler: There's that word trust again.

Francis: Trust is a big, big word.

Tarlton: Having a consistent lifestyle. A lifestyle that is has been proved, proved out over a years. To show the depth there in the roots. Proper scriptural foundation.

Researcher: Uh several of you guys mentioned longevity. If I had to press you on, we're never gonna get legalistic and enter a minimum number, but what do you think is a good solid amount of time that somebody has been at this church for them to be considered for eldership? Again, we're not locking anything in tonight is just a,

Tarlton: I would say, I don't know,

Cooper: Three to five.

Towler: Sounds like a sentence.

Francis: Yeah, really... Judge Deering three to five,

Tarlton: I have less about a, yeah, definitely there would have to be years of demonstrated lifestyle. Now whether that was in our church or just generally known. So if someone came from another church,

Cooper: Yeah. Like you take Jeff Mullican, he was very, he was a deacon at his previous church. It didn't take long for Jeff to move around and move into.

Francis: And you could see immediately his Servant's heart.

Researcher: So you'd be fine with a couple of years at this church in addition to years of service and another.

Tarlton: I think another thing, it's not just the years, but the adversity. So the longevity's not just the number of years but how have they been demonstrated through normal life, you know, ups and downs. Are they consistent in that for someone? You know? So I think, yeah, it kind of goes back to longevity.

Cooper: That's not just because you have gray hair, right?

Tarlton: Yeah. No, no, exactly right. And also having someone who just became a Christian, someone just became a believer in your church several years.

Francis: That goes back to the biblical mandate. Be careful with the young man.

Researcher: Upon your confirmation. So it was September, I believe, September 10th, 2017. We voted that night. I can't remember if there are any no votes. We're gonna have to look at them. I think it was completely unanimous. You guys plus Gary Pack were all voted and confirmed upon that confirmation. How would you say you felt, and in addition to that, how did your wife and/or family process this new role? I mean, did you have discussions that, or was that the month leading up? How did you feel upon this new role in the church?

Cooper: Additional responsibility.

Researcher: Such as... Let me, hold on Towler. Let me build on that. What would that, what was that additional responsibility that all of a sudden you felt

Cooper: The responsibility I guess, and that, that I had the role of impacting the future of this church, the future and present of the families that were here in their spiritual, their spiritual growth.

Researcher: It's a weight, isn't it?

Tarlton: You wouldn't know anything about that... Josh.

Francis: Can be frustrating too,

Researcher: Alright Towler continue.

Tarlton: Can this thing pick up sarcasm?

Researcher: Probably not. I wish it would.

Towler: There was a certain amount of uncertainty as far as you know, the added responsibility, I hate to keep going back to it, but making decisions now that could affect a lot of people in our church versus asking everybody what they thought the decision should be. No more of the democratic governance style. So I was a little nervous.

Researcher: See, I think both of you kind of said that, but the model we seemed to be using before was I would come to the room of deacons, ask your guys' opinion. But then you saw it as up to me or if I needed to take it to the congregation. You didn't feel that weight before? Whereas once we started calling you elders, you did?

Towler: I did.

Cooper: That's, yeah, that's before, the decision was with this big pool, now it's actually a much smaller pool.

Towler: And congregation isn't necessarily going to be involved. Where before they were.

Researcher: What's funny is I feel like it went from a smaller pool to a bigger pool! Anyway. Yeah. Well that's good. That's, it's just a different perspective that you guys started to feel some of that weight.

Francis: You read the biblical principles of what an elder should be, that you're responsible for someone's soul or some of those teachings in there, it's like, wow, boy, this is just heartbreaking. It can be harder. It's, it's going to be, or can be joyful experience or can be heartbreaking on some of the decisions that people make.

Researcher: So both Val and Gary had mentioned this, this idea of spiritual life. Did that kind of kick in a little heavier then, that was the biggest part of that weight?

Francis: Oh yeah.

Researcher: Somebody's walk with God was now affected by your shepherding?

Francis: Yes. And I also saw it like you as being broad-based. It seemed like that for years here. We then as a congregation, there are a lot of responsibility had been on the single shepherd to take care of things in the congregation.

Now it's going to be alone, the plurality of the shepherds. And it's like, Oh man, how long is it gonna take to turn this ship around? It's pretty good size ship. So I saw that as a challenge to involve more people. And like Gary talked about it a little bit in the spiritual growth to really get them not just coming and sitting in the pews, but to, to see them as ministers themselves and their own and their own influences of life.

Tarlton: I didn't really feel the nervousness around the responsibility aspect as far as making decisions and stuff. I did feel anxiety around feeling as a deacon. I didn't have a lot of time to serve in the capacity. I thought I should. Wow. Yeah, I felt that, okay, now I am going to be an elder and I'm, I still need to serve, but I didn't feel like I was, you know, adequate as a deacon as far as the amount of time I had to serve. I was anxious about that. And so just having the time to pour into people's lives.

Researcher: Alright. You can answer this one, honestly, too just pretend if you want to that I'm not in the room.

Tarlton: Yes they have all been dishonest answers up until now. (laughter)

Researcher: I'm just saying this can be, you'll see what I mean when I phrase this, you could be, I'm the, I'm the one that was responsible for this. So, but feel free to picture somebody else sitting here. Do you feel that you were adequately trained and equipped to do this new role? What was missing initially? What skills or knowledge do you think you still need? So do you think you were adequately trained and equipped upon your confirmation?

Towler: I think on expectations was, I think in many areas I felt like they were met and the area of maybe preaching and then we've been given opportunities to preach and teach. And obviously the teaching to me is, it seems a little easier than preaching, but I think it'd be great. And I, and I've only been the pulpit, you know, twice or once really since then it's been an elder. I've, I feel like I could maybe use more training there and yet it really hasn't been asked for it, but, you know what I'm saying? And when afforded the opportunity to preach was certainly, you trained, you know, felt much more comfortable after that process.

Tarlton: So I think going into it, as we already mentioned, we kind of made it clear to the congregation and to all of us that we were going to kind of figure it out as the way, you know, there wasn't the expectation that we had to come into it fully prepared, at least I, that was my impression. And I think that's also how we presented to the church. That was, I think that's why we

started off. And I thought that was really good that we started off with a study on what does it really mean to be an elder. So I thought that was good to start out that way. And then also sitting the expectation that yeah, I mean, are we ever adequately prepared? Do we ever feel adequately prepared for whatever it is? Isn't it? But just having that expectation that, hey, you know, we're going to grow together and learn this together. So, you know, I always question whether, you know, counseling with people, whether I'm prepared and so.

Francis: Preparation is ongoing, what we, it's what we're learning while we're doing. I don't think you can be, we can be expected to have it all down. If we did, we would probably have an arrogant attitude and miss the whole boat about wanting to, to meet the servant leadership and we all have our strengths and weaknesses teaching or preaching or whatever it would be. And I don't think we all have to be able to preach as good as Josh and Mason, but we all must be prepared to present some truths and ideas in any way we can. And I think we're doing that.

Researcher: So we've designed a structure that maintains what we call it, a point person, a lead pastor. Initially we decided to do that. We thought maybe sometimes in the future that gets smoothed out, we'll see kind of thing. But for now we have a lead pastor still. What's been good about that part of the structure and what's been challenging about that?

Tarlton: This is the one I'll answer honestly. You called it out. But I think my concern or the thing is that in some people's eyes, I don't know that it has, that much has changed because we still have the pastor and associate pastor. And I'm not saying that's bad. But I think in some people's minds it's just that it's the same old thing. I mean, even though behind the scenes, yes, definitely things have changed. It's different though.

Cooper: Maybe the elders should, need more exposure to the congregation, whether that be having Bible Studies, sermonettes, sermons, teaching or whatever. I almost feel like I have less involvement now than I ever did as a deacon.

Tarlton: I know. Yeah. And I struggled with that question on exposure, or visibility. I think visibility. I don't know that maybe this is, and again, I don't for me the concern isn't the visibility that there isn't visibility in what, as much as what we're doing, but that there has been this change and the meaning behind this change. And yeah. So I don't feel the need to be out in front of people more. But,

- Cooper: And how does the congregation feel? Do they feel like, yeah. Yeah. What do they feel?
- Researcher: Either of you guys, any challenges with having a point person? A lead pastor still?
- Francis: No, I think it's, it, it helps things flow. It helps the congregation know where it comes through, where, where did she come now the problem can be if the, if the lead pastor chooses to try to take all those things by himself. I'm not saying that if it's not, if it's not filtered into other ministries then that that doesn't look like,
- Cooper: Or if the impression is given that the lead pastor is doing all the work. Yeah. Whether that'd be the case at all. Yeah.
- Researcher: Do you think, do you think that's the impression here?
- Tarlton: I would think so too. A lot of it. But I mean, in reality you do a lot of, and I don't, I mean, I don't have, I feel like I don't have the time to do a lot of it right now, all of us.
- Researcher: So I mean that's what, that's one of the difficulties is that this comes down if we're honest. I'm here full time and get reimbursed for that time that you're, yes, it's going to be different. It's obviously going to be different, you know, with that kind of structure. But sure. But as a lay elder, especially you three, you know, I just wanted to...
- Cooper: Exposure. It is a disability.
- Tarlton: Yeah. And again, to me my biggest concern with it is just a mindset, you know, do, did the people have captured the biblical mindset shift that was made.
- Francis: And that's going to take time. That's a time thing. I think another factor that we don't really understand in this is the factor of Mason being able to come in and help and work help with Josh and being able to teach and do the things he used to is another dynamic. It's,
- Researcher: That is another dynamic that he might actually be taking opportunities that you guys would've had just because we're trying to get him to get some reps in preaching and stuff like that so we can send them off. So that's a good thought.

Tarlton: And I don't have an issue with that at all. I don't know. I don't have a solution. I also don't think it's a big problem. Yeah. I'm not saying that there's a hole, we've got to fix this or just this right now. Again, to me it's just,

Researcher: Well I like what you said, Barry that did the people actually catch the mindset of the change, right. You know what we presented, this is why it's needed. Did that actually, do they think that that is not right?

Tarlton: Cause I'm not at all trying to say we don't need someone that is here full time that is compensated for the time because otherwise there's so much you do that we couldn't pick up. And so I jokingly, you know, make fun of you for taking everything on your shoulders, but,

Researcher: But I don't have another full time job. Like you guys do.

Tarlton: Right. And so as much as I,

Researcher: Once a few of you guys retire, things change.

Francis: It's a part of your personality too.

Researcher: That's not for this study.

Tarlton: But yeah, so it's that real struggle with, yeah, we're, we're lay elders and we wanted to take up, take some of that burden and that's part of the plurality of elders, but it's hard as well.

Researcher: Another aspect of it, our structure then I wanted to touch on there is a spectrum of elder rule and elder leadership that we're all on the table. When the Constitution Committee met some churches go all the way to the point where elders rule and they are a self perpetuating body. They named the other elders and they see that as very biblical all the way over to elders do almost nothing. Everything is still taken to the congregation. It's just they have elders in name. We have maintained a structure that still has some congregational authority through voting on several bigger issues and decisions. So we're not elder rule. I would call us elder led. What has been good about that and what's been challenging about that? The fact that the congregation still has the ultimate authority over, you know, big, big decisions.

Towler: I don't know that it's been that challenging because it's like Gary said, it's been less change with that part in mind. Maybe I'm wrong.

Cooper: No I think you're right. I don't want to interrupt you. But I, I think the transition from being completely a congregational controlled church, if you tried to go to an elder ruled church, that would not have worked. So where we are I think is a very balanced structure and I think it sets our congregation and in that transition, I didn't, I don't think we had much resistance to that because they felt the congregation felt like we still have a voice in the large issues, large decision making. I think that's a plus for the congregation. Now does that, does that slow progress down and, or decision making as an impede growth for the, for the church? I, I don't think it does with the body, with the body of believers that we have here now. I don't think it slows down the decision making in any way. You know, that we, yeah, if it's large we take it back to the congregation, but I think it's very good, very healthy.

Francis: I do too. It's leadership and again, think again, it goes back to trust. It goes back to, you think about all the years I've been in this church, some of the major decisions that have been made, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars. We still get our 40 to 50 people that have a congregation of 225 or so. They come to vote too. There is a level of trust here to the people that are serving in leadership and I don't think it's necessarily a bad thing as long as we continue to allow people to know what we're doing and why. It's always been received. There's not been anybody trying to force anything down anybody's throat and that's been a good thing.

Researcher: All of you have you been going to FBC for a significant number of years? I think Towler you would be the junior on that with 20 years under your belt. Right. Given your history here, are you surprised at the ease of this transition? Why or why not? Are there any particular events that made you think we were ready or not ready for such a change? I'm gonna refer back to something I think Barry said. Just to reference an event back in question one that you went pastor-less for awhile here and you thought that that helped develop a, an equipping mindset of the, of the congregation. Are there other events like that that you can think of? Anything stick out in the history of FBC?

Francis: People stepped up in the vacuum and people stepped up for what needed to be done. I think timing was everything too. The timing was so the Baptist Church has been steeped in tradition and things have gone on at the top of the people we're trying to reach. This has changed too and we've always been very biblically based church. And it just, it seemed like with you coming and your leadership, your station in life where you were age wise, that it just, it just absolutely made sense. I was, I was told that there

was another church that wanted to be in our association that wanted to be a Southern Baptist Church and they had elders and they were told they couldn't be because they, they did that. So there was a, there was a, a little prevailing attitude in the past that the elders weren't the way to go. But biblically, there's no question. It was, I just, the timing was everything.

Cooper: I think timing was any timing locally timing in the Southern Baptist Convention. And I think there was, there was, there was in a trans, there was a transition and anytime you have the church has a long time, well, loved pastor, that next guy, many times with a sacrificial lamb, Roger Houck was a sacrificial lamb, a sacrificial lamb. He tried to make some changes and he told us if we didn't change this church was going to die in 20 years. Okay. He didn't know how. And then we had, we had Greg Schaffer, Greg, you know, he did. He was able to make some changes. He wasn't able to make the changes, all the changes that he wanted, but we were moving that way. People were started being open more open minded. He was a catalyst. And you know, so you know, things are moving that way. So was I surprised or concerned? That there would not be more. Yes. I was surprised, pleasantly surprised that there wasn't more resistance to change. Okay. But the way it's processed, procedure-wise when it's handled, you know very well.

Francis: Yeah. Made all the difference.

Researcher: How much do you think how already having associate pastors was a factor? Do you think that factored in at all? Let's say, let, let me back up in the history of FBC and nothing happens to Bill Moore cause that's when the associate pastor role started. Before that in our history, we never had that title before. So, and we maintain that one pastor role. Do you think we would have been less open? Do you think it was a factor or not?

Francis: It's a tough thing to try to think what would have happened.

Researcher: It is, it's a tough hypothetical. Yes.

Tarlton: I've never considered it. I never considered that. But actually thinking back on it now, maybe it did cause some. My wife said, well we've had a, you know, associate pastor want to have some more or something. So that mindset, that's a good thing.

Cooper: I thought, I think it did. It probably aided the transition. People begin to understand and be involved in, you know, there's more than one pastor.

Yeah. Yeah. Started moving I guess the focal point away from, you know, one man. Okay.

Researcher: Couple of cleanup questions now. Overall, how do you think things are going as a result of this transition? Do you think it was the right move? But along with that, what do we, you guys all said it was a process of growth. What do we need to continue to grow in and do differently? So how do you think things are going? Do you think it was the right move and then how can we continue to improve?

Towler: I think it was the right move. Again, wasn't totally sure about everything in the beginning, but I think, you know, education scripture, you know, helped reinforce that it was the right move. I think that's how we did say it was the right move and then how was it received that, you know, as it could be, you know, whether it could've been received not so well, but I think it has been received well very well. And I think it was a gradual turn of events and you know, like the smooth as can be expected. I don't know that I would have changed anything. I don't know that I would change anything

Tarlton: That you would and you don't know that you would change anything. Oh yeah, yeah. No,

Cooper: I think it was like we need to fill the need to fill the board up.

Francis: What do you mean by that? You mean add more men?

Cooper: Yeah. Right.

Tarlton: Yeah, I agree with that. But I mean I think it's, we've been wise and not just trying to fill it up positions because we need people. Yeah. It's about making sure we choose the right people. But yeah, I'd say definitely right decision. You know, I think it's, it's good. It's taken us, uh, in the right direction.

Francis: Trying to create more exposure for elders and what they do. And without doing it in a way that you're pumping up flesh or pumping up people, maybe we could do a little better job at that at times.

Researcher: It is a hard balance, isn't it? How do we do this without promoting individuals? Yes.

- Francis: How can, how can we create within people and demonstrate the abilities that a man like Barry or Gary has or that Gary has and how they're demonstrated and by doing that, don't, the reason would be not to highlight these people, but to encourage people that are developing their own gifts to as a, as a way of, you know, spiritual development for them and at the role that an elder, an elder plays.
- Cooper: You know what? I guess I am going to be very candid. One impression that I have, there's a lot of decisions are made outside of the elders that decisions are actually made before they get to the elders.
- Researcher: Can you give me an example? Who by? Yeah, by me? By staff?
- Cooper: By staff. I just think there's decisions that get made that really should come to be discussed with the elders before they're discussed with staff. And we go to the finance committee as an example with different things. Yeah.
- Researcher: Anything else? Uh, last one then. Just anything else you would note and think about it as telling another church that is considering this transition, what is a piece of advice that you could give them? One more thing that you would know that you don't feel like you've said so far that I didn't, I didn't catch in a prompt.
- Francis: Diligent preparation. I know we've said that in different ways. Preparation before you just throw this on.
- Cooper: And education. That all goes in together, you know, prayer, preparation, education, communication,
- Francis: Humility. Christians need to be more humble. All of these.
- Tarlton: Yeah, I think that's a big one. I was thinking about humility but then another word to kind of push that maybe be a good the potential elders, the people that are being considered for eldership to maybe talk with them individually. If you have a pastor you know about how they feel about serving with the other potential elders to help understand if there's personality conflicts and maybe the heart of the person that is being considered. Cause that's something I think with us that in relation to that. I just know, I mean the hearts of the other men in this room, you know, there's none of that pride or arrogance or lust for power. And so I know I can say what I truly think and feel and if I don't code it in the most kind

loving words, I know that there having mercy and grace and take it with the best intent.

Researcher: Anything else? Yeah, of course. He's already hit his pumpkin time. It's time. All right guys, thank you very much.

Cooper: No, I think there's one huge advantage of going to elders is that when you have a pastor and deacons, as an example, you know, in the past, the pastor here was expected to preach three times a week and do all the visitation.

Francis: Yup. And study and, and smile on his face. Right. Okay.

Cooper: But with elders, that workload could be distributed.

Francis: It's so nice when you know someone's in a hospital in Chillicothe and you can give Gary a call, he'll slip out or Barry in Columbus and you do things, or if I'm up there, it just, that's, we're just a team of servants.

Tarlton: Now we're done.

APPENDIX 11

PREVIOUS FBC CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS (2010)
EXCERPTS RELATING TO CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Constitution and Bylaws of the
First Baptist Church of
Waverly, Ohio

ARTICLE I

Name

This Church shall be known as the First Baptist Church of Waverly, Ohio.

ARTICLE II

Character

Polity:

This church is an autonomous body, operating through democratic processes under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

The government of this church shall be vested in the membership seeking the leadership of the Holy Spirit. It recognizes and sustains the obligations of mutual counsel and cooperation like faith and order, but is subject to the control of no other ecclesiastical body. All active members upon the floor of the body have equal rights, and are entitled to equal privileges and consideration from all officers and other members.

Doctrine:

This church accepts the Scriptures as its sole authority in matters of faith and practice.

...

BYLAWS

ARTICLE I

SECTION I

Senior Pastor:

Qualifications

1. In choosing a Senior Pastor, the church shall look for characteristics as set forth in the following scripture:
 - 1 Timothy 3:1-7
 - Titus 1:7-9
 - I Corinthians 13:4-8
 - Galatians 5:22-26
 - Ephesians 4:11-13
2. A Senior Pastor must evidence a clear call from God to pastoral ministry.

Responsibilities

1. The responsibility of the Senior Pastor shall be as in Acts 6:4
 - Ministry
 - Prayer
 - Ministry of the Word
 - Leading the church to function as a New Testament Church.
 - Leading the congregation, the organizations, and the church staff to fulfill the Great Commission.
 - Conducting the worship services of the church.
 - Administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.
 - Having the option to preside at all business meetings of the church.
 - Visiting regularly the membership of the church and prospective members.
2. As an ex-officio member the Senior Pastor shall work with all church committees, ministry teams and department heads.
3. When the Senior Pastor expects to be gone from the pulpit, he shall notify the Deacons and find a suitable pulpit supply.
4. The Senior Pastor may be absent from the pulpit during the year as follows:
 - 0 - 2 years service at First Baptist Church - 2 weeks' vacation
 - 3 - 4 years service at First Baptist Church - 3 weeks' vacation
 - 5 or more years service at First Baptist Church - 4 weeks' vacation
 - Two weeks for the Senior Pastor to lead in revival efforts in other churches or mission fields.
 - One Sunday when required in conjunction with attendance at the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention.
 - Illness of the Senior Pastor pulpit supply will be paid by the church for a period of three months and thereafter as otherwise directed by the church.
 - Senior Pastor and Ministerial Staff shall coordinate vacation.

SECTION II

Ministerial Staff - Associate Pastor:

Qualifications

1. In choosing the Ministerial Staff, the church shall look for characteristics as set forth in the following scripture:
 - 1 Timothy 3:1-7
 - Titus 1:7-9
 - I Corinthians 13:4-8
 - Galatians 5:22-26
 - Ephesians 4:11-13
2. The Ministerial Staff must evidence a clear call from God to pastoral ministry.
3. The Ministerial Staff must understand the principle of authority as found in the following scriptures:
 - Colossians 3:22-24
 - Hebrews 13:17a
 - I Timothy 5:17-18
 - I Peter 5:1-3

Responsibilities:

1. The Ministerial Staff serves at the discretion of the Senior Pastor. Ministerial Staff shall assist the Senior Pastor in ministering to the needs of the First Baptist Church.
2. The Ministerial Staff will submit a weekly report on Monday to the Senior Pastor, as well as the Deacons, if they desire, of the achievements and activities of the prior week.
3. The Associate Pastor Ministerial Staff vacation and absence schedule will duplicate that of the Senior Pastor.
4. The responsibilities of the Ministerial Staff position shall be governed by the job description. From time to time the Senior Pastor, Deacons, and Personnel Committee reserve the right to modify the responsibilities of this staff member.
5. A weekly staff meeting with the Senior Pastor, Church Secretary, and Ministerial Staff Members shall be held at the discretion of the Senior Pastor.

Calling-Dismissing:

1. The Ministerial Staff position shall be called and employed as the Senior Pastor and Deacons determine the need for such offices.
2. When the Senior Pastor and Deacons determine that a staff member is needed, they shall bring that recommendation to the church for a vote. They shall present the job responsibilities to the church for a vote.
3. If the Church approves by a simple majority vote, the church shall elect a search committee consisting of 3 men and 2 women, to search for an appropriate candidate.
4. The search committee, upon the leading of the Holy Spirit, will recommend to the church a candidate to fill the need and shall set a time for the candidate to come to the church. In the case of an Associate Pastor, the candidate will preach or in the case of other staff positions, share their testimony with the church. There will also be a time of fellowship and a time of questioning, followed by a vote of the church in the evening service, whether or not to call said candidate.

A vote of 80% of the eligible members present and voting by secret ballot will be required to constitute a call to the Ministerial Staff candidate.

Dismissing:

If problems should arise in the church of such nature as to warrant its consideration, the Pastor may, with the concurrence of a majority of the Deacons, ask the Associate Pastor and/or exempt staff to be dismissed. They will notify the church, as in item C, and it will require 80% of the eligible members present and voting to dismiss him. With the Ministerial Staff member, the Senior Pastor and Deacons will attempt to resolve those problems. If the Senior Pastor and Deacons are unable to resolve the problems, a vote of dismissal from the church body shall terminate the employment of that Ministerial Staff position. It will require a majority of the members present and voting to dismiss him. The amount of severance pay, if deemed appropriate, will be determined by a majority of the Deacons, subject to the aforementioned majority approval of the church.

SECTION III.

Deacons:

The **Senior** Pastor and Deacons shall be responsible for nominating men to become Deacons. In addition, nominations for Deacons shall be accepted in writing from the congregation to the Deacon body. Only men who are qualified according to the Scriptures will be considered (Acts 6:1-7 & I Tim. 3:8-13). The **Senior** Pastor and Deacons shall recommend to the church each year new Deacons according to the number needed and to their qualifications. Deacons shall be elected by secret ballot by a simple majority vote. Each Deacon may actively and continuously serve at his discretion and the pleasure of the church.

Duties:

The duties of Deacons shall be those set forth in the scriptures, as well as what the **Senior** Pastor and church shall ask of them in ministering to the needs of the families of the church.

Qualifications:

1. A Deacon shall be a man of moral integrity and spiritual maturity. His life shall be a clean and pure life concerning his basic Christian character. He shall realize that he is a representative of Christ's Church and shall be willing to assume the responsibility of conducting himself in a manner that will honor the name of God in every area of his life.
2. Inasmuch as one of the requirements of a Deacon is that he shall be "apt to teach", the Deacon should participate in the full teaching and training of the church. He shall seek to be a good steward of his time, giving a fair share of it to church activities.
3. He shall be in agreement with and participate in the financial program of the church lucre (I Tim. 3:6). The Deacon shall be a good steward of his income, recognizing the tithe as the minimum.
4. The Deacon shall be a good steward, supportive and faithful, to the regular meetings and services of the church.

5. The Deacons shall address the financial needs of people in the community.

SECTION IV.

Trustees:

1. Trustees shall serve as legal representative of the church.
2. The Trustees will hold in trust the property for the church. They have no power to buy, sell, mortgage, lease, or transfer any property without specific vote of the church authorizing such action.
3. Seven (7) Trustees shall be elected annually by the church.
4. The Trustees shall meet at least one time annually to review the status of church property, deeds, insurance, and legal papers, including Articles of Incorporation and shall advise the church of any necessary action.
5. The Trustees shall be responsible for securing a safety deposit box for keeping important legal documents therein.
6. The Chairman of the Trustees and the Legal Statutory Agent shall have custody of the safety deposit box keys.
7. The Trustees shall meet with the Building and Grounds Committee semi-annually as needed to discuss mutual concerns.

SECTION V.

Other Officers:

1. Church Clerk/Assistant Clerk
The church shall elect a Clerk and Assistant Clerk.
 - a. The Clerk of the church shall keep in a suitable book a record of all the actions of the church except as otherwise herein provided.
 - b. The Clerk shall keep a register of the name of members, with dates of admissions, dismissal, or death, together with a record of baptisms.
 - c. The Clerk shall issue letters of recommendation requested by other Baptist churches, preserve on file all communications and written official reports, and give legal notice of all meetings when such notice is necessary.
 - d. The Clerk shall notify members coming on promise of letter of the reception of said letter.
 - e. The Clerk shall notify the Senior Pastor if a problem arises concerning transfer of letter.
 - f. The Assistant Clerk shall perform the duties of the Church Clerk when necessary and shall serve as recording secretary.
2. Treasurer
The church shall elect a Treasurer and an Assistant Treasurer.
 - a. The Treasurer shall receive a receipt from the Finance Committee of all money deposited.
 - b. The Treasurer shall receive a complete purchase order or receipt for all purchases.
 - c. Regular monthly expenses shall be paid by the Treasurer.
 - d. Records shall be kept of all deposits and expenditures that have been paid and a monthly written report made to the church. Approval of the financial reports shall be made at the regular business meetings.

- e. Within thirty days after the end of each fiscal year, which shall be January 1 to December 31, the Treasurer shall render to the church an annual report showing the total amount of receipts and disbursements.
3. Assistant Treasurer
- a. The Assistant Treasurer shall perform the duties of the Treasurer when necessary and shall serve as recording secretary for all tithes and offering.
 - b. The Assistant Treasurer shall receive the empty collection envelopes and worksheet.
 - c. The Assistant Treasurer shall record all tithing receipts and shall distribute tithing statements to all members as necessary.
4. Moderator:
- The Senior Pastor shall be the Moderator of the Church. In the absence of the Senior Pastor, the Associate Pastor Chairman of the Deacons will serve as Moderator. In the absence of the Associate Pastor Chairman of the Deacons Chairman of the Deacons one of the Deacons will serve as the Moderator of the Church. In the absence of the chairman of the Deacons, one of the Deacons shall call the church to order and a Moderator shall be elected.

SECTION VI.

Church Council:

- a. The Church Council shall seek to help plan and coordinate the activities and organizations of the church.
- b. The Church Council shall be composed of the directors of following ministries:
 - Audio/Visual Chair
 - Chair of Bylaws Committee
 - Chair of Missions
 - Chair of Prison Ministry
 - Chairman of the Building and Grounds
 - Chairman of the Deacons
 - Chairman of the Nursery Committee
 - Chairman of the Senior Ministry
 - Chairman of the Singles Ministry
 - Commander of Awana
 - Music Director
 - President of Baptist Men
 - Special Activities Director
 - Sunday School Director
 - Treasurer
 - Vacation Bible School Director
 - WOM Director
 - Youth Director
 - And any Other Standing Committee Chairperson
- c. The **Senior** Pastor pastoral staff members and **Ministerial Staff** shall be ex-officio members of the Church Council.
- d. The Church Council shall make recommendations to the church for its approval at regular business meetings.

APPENDIX 12

NEW FBC CONSTITUTION AND BY-LAWS (2017):
EXCERPTS RELATING TO CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Constitution and By-laws of the
First Baptist Church of Waverly, Ohio

Revised and Adopted August 13, 2017

CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE I

Name

This Church shall be known as the First Baptist Church of Waverly, Ohio.
(AKA First Baptist, FBC, FBC Waverly)

...

ARTICLE III

Beliefs

This church accepts the Scriptures, the Holy Bible, as its sole authority in matters of faith and practice. As a summary of our biblical beliefs we adopt and ascribe to *The Baptist Faith and Message*, revised 2000 (available on request or at www.sbc.net/bfm2000). The final interpretive authority of these documents within the congregation will be the board of Elders.

ARTICLE IV

Government

This church is an autonomous body under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It recognizes and sustains the obligations of mutual counsel and cooperation with churches of like faith and order, but is subject to the control of no other ecclesiastical body. This church shall be led by the board of Elders and congregationally governed through democratic processes according to the by-laws, policies, and procedures.

...

BY-LAWS

...

ARTICLE II Leadership

SECTION I - Elders

This church shall be led by a group of men with the biblical office of Elder. The group shall focus on prayer and the teaching of God's Word while overseeing all matters of the church and shepherding the congregation.

Qualifications -

An Elder shall be a congregationally approved man who meets the qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:6-9. In general, an Elder shall...

- be a man who is spiritually mature.
- have a proven spiritual leadership record within his family and within the church.
- be well thought of in the church and in the local community.
- agree wholeheartedly with the *Baptist Faith and Message*.
- be able to teach and articulate the church's beliefs and their own personal faith.

Responsibilities -

The Elders' responsibilities can be summarized in 3 areas: 1) Teaching, 2) Shepherding, and 3) Leading.

Teaching. The Elders should always be promoting teaching rooted in the Word of God, not just man-made curriculum or current opinions. To fulfill this teaching responsibility, the Elders will...

- ensure all teaching at the church represents the beliefs of the church.
- ensure that those teaching in various capacities are qualified to do so.
- train other Teachers.
- be willing themselves to teach various Bible studies and doctrinal classes.
- be available to preach in the absence of the Lead Pastor.

Shepherding. The Elders should always be striving to create an environment of grace *and* authenticity that reflects God's unconditional love and uncompromising truth. To fulfill this shepherding responsibility, the Elders will...

- be responsible for overseeing the spiritual well-being of the congregation.
- consistently pray for all members of the church.
- oversee the Deacons in ministering to the congregation.
- be available to visit and pray for the sick or hurting as requested.
- be available for emergency counseling and will follow up with needs or delegate the follow up to the appropriate person(s).
- conduct membership interviews.
- lead the process in church discipline matters.
- lead in the administration of the Lord's Supper.

Leading. The Elders should always be discerning God's will for the direction of the church, not just deciding based on their personal opinion. To fulfill this leadership responsibility, the Elders will...

- in larger matters that are required to go before the congregation, work to inform the church of the various possibilities and encourage the people to seek God's will in the matter.
- reach consensus as a body and move forward on matters that do not have to go before the entire congregation. They may also call for a vote to get the congregation's viewpoint (though not a binding decision unless they declare it as such).
- set the overall vision and direction of the church.
- oversee financial matters of the church (in conjunction with the Finance Committee).
- set policies and procedures (in conjunction with the Rules Committee).
- evaluate all Church Staff, hire or terminate Administrative and Support Staff as needed, or recommend the hiring or termination of Ministerial Staff.
- work with Ministry Team Leaders to ensure the fulfillment of the mission and vision of the church.
- create new Ministry Teams, discontinue existing Ministry Teams, or appoint ad hoc committees for specific purposes as they see fit. (see Article IV)

Appointment

Elders will be recommended as needed by the current group of Elders. This recommendation will follow a process of prayer and vetting a candidate to ensure he meets the qualifications. A candidate can be suggested through the observation of the Elders, referral by a church member, or by a man expressing a desire to seek the position. Upon recommendation by the Elders, the congregation will vote to approve the candidate. The candidate must receive an 80% affirmative vote from the congregation to be approved as an Elder.

Dismissal

If at any time the leadership or character of a particular Elder is called into question, the rest of the Elders will hear accusations and confront the situation similar to any other need for church discipline (Matt 18:15-17, 1 Tim 5:19). If the rest of the Elders believe it is best for the individual to step down, but he refuses to do so, the Elders may call for a vote of confidence from the congregation. The Elder in question must receive an 80% vote of confidence to remain as an Elder.

Structure

- Both vocational pastors and men not in the employ of the church may be considered for Eldership, but the number of non-staff Elders must always be greater than the number of paid staff Elders.
- With as much notice as possible, any non-staff Elder may request a leave of absence for personal reasons. Upon the leave of absence or the resignation of an Elder, the remaining Elders should determine whether a replacement is needed. A replacement is only absolutely necessary if the leave has caused the number of staff Elders to be equal to or greater than non-staff Elders.

- Authority for leadership of the church is vested in the Elders as a team. As such, no one Elder has more authority than the others. However, the Lead Pastor will serve as the point person for this team. The Elders are expected to model mutual submission within their team as they seek the will of Christ in all matters.

SECTION II - Lead Pastor

The Lead Pastor will be an Elder of the church and will possess no more formal authority than any other Elder. His role is to be the point person for the Elder team and will have the same expectations as other Elders. The Lead Pastor may come from within the church or outside the local church body. In addition to the Elder responsibilities, the Lead Pastor will...

- be expected to be formally trained or pursuing formal training in ministry.
- lead and organize the group of Elders.
- be the primary Teacher / preacher on Sunday mornings.
- provide oversight for the staff and day-to-day operations of the church.
- be available for more in-depth counseling when necessary.
- serve as representation of the church to community meetings.

Appointment of a Lead Pastor is under the charge of the Elder body similar to any other Elder appointment. However, since a Lead Pastor may be called from outside of the local church body, the Elders must form a representatively diverse search team of 5-7 members (including 1-2 members from the Elders) approved by the congregation. This search team will make a recommendation to the congregation along with the Elders. The candidate must receive an 80% affirmative vote to be considered approved as Lead Pastor.

Dismissal of a Lead Pastor will be in the same fashion as any other Elder. After considering all sides of the situation, the Elders can call for a vote of confidence at which the pastor must receive an 80% affirmative vote or else be removed from his position.

The salary and benefits package for a Lead Pastor will be determined by the other Elders in conjunction with the Finance Committee. Other issues regarding the Lead Pastor's job duties and performance will be handled by the other Elders.

SECTION III - Ministerial Staff

Other Ministerial Staff may be recommended by the Elders as needed. Ministerial staff are those who have been called to at least part-time vocational ministry and have been trained or are pursuing training for vocational ministry. Their role is to help accomplish the mission of the church in specific areas with a focus on equipping others in the work of the ministry. This could include, but is not limited to, Associate Pastor, Youth Pastor, Worship Pastor, Seniors Minister, Children's Minister, Small Groups Pastor, or a professional Counselor.

Upon discerning the need for a position, the Elders may recommend an individual to fill the position or form a search team to find a candidate. The Elders will be responsible for vetting the candidates and the individual must be in agreement with the church's stated beliefs if they aren't already a member and must submit to a background check. The

candidate will be presented at a membership meeting for a vote of approval from the congregation. The candidate must receive an 80% affirmative vote to be approved as Ministerial Staff.

Salary and other benefits for Ministerial Staff employees will be set by the Elders in conjunction with the Finance Committee. Once employed, the Ministerial Staff member will report to the Lead Pastor and be under the leadership of the Elders as a group.

Any employed Ministerial Staff member will continue to hold to the belief statement outlined in Article III of the constitution and will be expected to hold to the same biblical lifestyle and character standards set forth in the Membership Commitment, Article I, Section I of the By-Laws. Dismissal of a Ministerial Staff member will follow the same procedure as an Elder or Lead Pastor. After considering all sides of the situation and pursuing restorative actions, the Elders can call for a vote of confidence at which the Ministerial Staff member must receive an 80% affirmative vote.

SECTION IV - Support Staff

Church Support Staff may be recommended by the Elders or Ministerial Staff as needed. Support staff are those who are not necessarily called to ministry vocationally but are employed by the church for a specific role. This could include, but is not limited to, Administrative Assistants, Maintenance Staff, or Program Directors. This will also include Ministry Interns who are hired for a specific ministerial role but only for a temporary period of time.

Upon discerning the need for a position, the Elders may fill the position or form a search team to fill the position. The Elders will be responsible for vetting the candidate and the individual must not be in contention with the church's stated beliefs if they aren't a member, must be willing to live by the lifestyle standards set forth in the Membership Commitment and must submit to a background check. The candidate does not need an approval from the congregation. (However, if the position is a new, previously unbudgeted role and the annual expenditure for the role exceeds the discretionary spending limit for the Elders, the position itself should be congregationally approved in which case a 2/3 majority is needed for approval).

Salary and other benefits for Support Staff employees will be set by the Elders in conjunction with the Finance Committee. Once employed, the Support Staff member will report to the Lead Pastor or other assigned Ministerial Staff member.

All Support Staff will be expected to continue to uphold the doctrinal statement and biblical lifestyle standards made in the Membership Commitment. Dismissal of a Support Staff employee does not require a church vote. After considering all sides of the situation and pursuing restorative actions, the Elders, following the recommendation of the Lead Pastor and/or other staff, may terminate employment of any Support Staff member and begin seeking a replacement or terminate the position.

SECTION V - Other Church Leadership

There will be other volunteer leadership within the organization of this church. Each of these roles are key leadership positions that will help the Elders and Ministerial Staff complete the mission of the church. As such, they should be appointed and equipped with great care. The Elders will be responsible for appointing and vetting these positions, but will seek church approval and recognize new leaders at membership meetings.

Teachers

- Teachers will assist in instructing the congregation in the truth of God's Word in ongoing small groups such as Sunday School classes and various other short term Bible Studies. They may also occasionally be asked to speak at a worship gathering.
- Teachers will be appointed and vetted by the Elders in conjunction with the appropriate Ministry Team Leaders as need arises. Those requested to serve as a Teacher may serve under provisional status until the next member meeting when they can receive congregational approval.
- Teachers should receive regular training in teaching skills and biblical and theological topics and occasionally meet with the Elders to discuss the teaching needs of the congregation.
- Teachers will be expected to continue to uphold the doctrinal statement and biblical lifestyle standards made in the Membership Commitment. The Elders may dismiss a Teacher or request a hiatus for a violation of these standards or for a lack of effectiveness.

Deacons

- Deacons will assist in shepherding the congregation and promoting a spirit of love and care throughout the church. Deacons will be men caring for people in the church and/or the community under whatever structure the Elders put into place. Deacons will be expected to meet the biblical qualifications of 1 Tim 3:8-13. If married, a Deacon's wife will be expected to serve alongside him as a team and meet certain qualifications as well. (1 Tim 3:11)
- Deacons will be appointed and vetted by the Elders as need arises. Those requested to serve as Deacons may serve under provisional status until the next member meeting when they can receive congregational approval.
- Deacons should receive regular training in follow up and counseling skills and occasionally meet with the Elders for the purpose of praying for the congregation and discussing congregational needs.
- Deacons will be expected to continue to uphold the doctrinal statement and biblical lifestyle standards made in the Membership Commitment. The Elders may dismiss a Deacon or request a hiatus for a violation of these standards or for a lack of effectiveness.

Ministry Team Leaders

- Ministry Team Leaders will assist in leading the congregation to fulfill ministry tasks and helping people engage in their purpose. These Team Leaders will oversee specific areas of ministry and be responsible for the meetings, structure, and training within their team.

- Ministry Team Leaders will be appointed and vetted by the Elders as need arises. Those requested to serve as leaders may serve under provisional status until the next member meeting when they can receive congregational approval.
- Ministry Team Leaders should receive regular training in various leadership skills and occasionally meet with the Elders for the purpose of evaluating the vision and mission of the church.
- Ministry Team Leaders will be expected to continue to uphold the doctrinal statement and biblical lifestyle standards made in the Membership Commitment. The Elders may dismiss a Ministry Team Leader or request a hiatus for a violation of these standards or for a lack of effectiveness.

SECTION VI - Other Church Offices and Positions

Treasurer / Assistant Treasurer

The church shall elect a Treasurer and an Assistant Treasurer. The Treasurer / Assistant Treasurer will...

- work with the Finance Committee to properly count, document, and deposit offerings given to the church.
- pay and record both regular monthly expenses and one time expenditures.
- present regular financial reports to the Elders, the Finance Committee, and the membership.

Church Clerk/Assistant Clerk

The church shall elect a Clerk and Assistant Clerk who will keep record of official actions of the church. To assist church administration, the Clerk / Assistant Clerk will also...

- keep a register of the name of members, with dates of admissions, dismissal, or death, together with a record of baptisms.
- issue letters of recommendation requested by other Baptist churches, preserve on file all communications and written official reports, and give legal notice of all meetings when such notice is necessary.
- notify members coming on promise of letter of the reception of said letter, or notify the Lead Pastor if a problem arises concerning transfer of letter.

Trustees

Trustees shall serve as legal representatives of the church. 5-7 Trustees shall be elected annually by the church. Trustees will...

- Hold in trust the property for the church. They have no power to buy, sell, mortgage, lease, or transfer any property without specific vote of the church authorizing such action.
- meet at least one time annually to review the status of church property, deeds, insurance, and legal papers, including Articles of Incorporation and shall advise the church of any necessary action.
- be responsible for securing a safe location, such as a safety deposit box or fire safe, for keeping important legal documents.

Children's and Youth Volunteers

Any individual that regularly works with persons under the age of 18 will be subject to a background and reference check regardless of task. Elders or Team Leaders may decide to decline or reassign any potential or existing children's or youth volunteer based on anything in their background check, information from references, violations of policies and procedures or because of their own observation and concern.

Corporate Worship Participants

Because of the visibility of those participating in the worship team or otherwise presenting at a corporate worship meeting, individuals in such a role, whether a member or not, will be expected to uphold the doctrinal statement and biblical lifestyle standards made in the Membership Commitment. The Elders may choose not to allow an individual to present or participate based on a deviation of these standards.

ARTICLE III

Meetings

...

SECTION II - Membership meetings

A meeting for members should be held at least quarterly. This meeting should update the members on the ministry and finances of the church and conduct any necessary business. The Elders and other church leaders should present reports, concerns, and new endeavors for consideration. The meetings will be conducted in an orderly fashion based on Robert's Rules of Order and may include worship, prayer, and/or a devotion. For business matters, the Elders will appoint a moderator.

SECTION III - Special Business Meetings

Additional business meetings may be called with prior notice at a regular church service at least one (1) week before the date stating the purpose of the meeting. The meetings will be conducted in an orderly fashion based on Robert's Rules of Order and the Elders will appoint a moderator.

SECTION IV - Congregational Voting

The Elders will determine the method of voting for a particular issue (i.e. by a show of hands, paper ballot, etc.). Unless announced before the meeting, a quorum shall consist of those active members present at the meeting and voting. However, if they so choose before the meeting, the Elders may require an alternative quorum size for a particular issue. If the required quorum is not reached at that meeting, the vote should stay open for a stated period of time and all active members should be notified on how to register their vote. If the time limit expires without reaching the required number, the motion will be considered denied due to lack of participation.

When voting, active members are expected to seek the Lord's will and not just provide a personal opinion. Following is a summary of what members will vote on at membership and business meetings:

- Approval or Dismissal of an Elder, Lead Pastor, or Ministerial Staff Member, 80% affirmative needed to approve (80% needed to stay in a vote of confidence)
- The annual budget, two-thirds majority needed to approve
- Unbudgeted expenditures above \$10,000, two-thirds needed to approve
- Any real estate transactions, two-thirds needed to approve
- Any changes to the constitution or by-laws, two-thirds needed to approve
- Approval of certain committees and leaders, 80% to approve

APPENDIX 13

SERMON NOTES FROM 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-13 PREACHED JULY 9, 2017 AT FBC

Intro... Superheroes & leadership expectations

Series Review... Paul is writing to his assistant Timothy in Ephesus about what to expect and how to lead a community of faith. Since Ephesus is quite a bit like our modern situation, we are trying to learn from what Paul has to say to Timothy to apply to our community of faith

Doctrine... started with a discussion of doctrine where we learned that what we believe matters, but not everything we believe matters as much... and ALL of our beliefs should result in love

Law Points to Christ... then Paul applied this logic to the Law of God's word and we found that all of us fall short and the rules are there to show us our need for Christ... so we can't pretend they don't exist and we can't pretend they make us look good.

Prayer... last week, we looked at the necessity and the power of prayer within a community of faith

Men and Women... Focus on Christ... not disagreements, not each other. Men and Women should be in the same community of faith, but treat it like the family... seems to limit the role of elder to men.

Remember the context of this early church forming for the first time and figuring everything out...

See the flow of what Paul is talking about with Timothy... sound doctrine is the foundation and proper prayer and worship are vital... now he is going to add the idea of leadership within the church.

PRAYER

Paul is now going to tell Timothy how to select leaders. He tells Titus, who is another assistant of his, to do something very similar on the island of Crete...

So... we see that There needs to be some leadership in the church... this community of faith... and somehow we have to find the balance somewhere between the two extremes of clericalism and anti-clericalism (I, surprisingly, have wondered whether we need church leadership... can't we all just follow Christ together)

Paul starts with what we would call pastors, whom he here calls "overseers" and elsewhere are called "elders"

1 Timothy 3 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer^[a] must be above reproach, the husband of one wife,^[b] sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Overseer / bishop = elder = pastor

Trustworthy saying – second time used... first (1:15)... that Jesus came to save sinners... and that Paul was chief sinner

"Aspire to" didn't mean for selfish gain like we think of today... perhaps he means a type of calling from God... and that it is a noble task... a responsibility. Those who are willing to step up and lead the church desires a good thing... but desire is not enough... this is an important job, so Paul lists some requirements...

What to expect from church leadership...

{Christ-Like Character}... a lot of subpoints to this one...

[Above reproach] doesn't mean faultless, but someone of integrity... what you saw was who they were... everything was out in the open... and their observable behavior was something you couldn't really bring a charge against

[sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable]... someone who is able to control himself even in difficult situations, able to respond instead of just react...

[hospitable]... literally, a lover of strangers

[not a drunkard]... now we know that Paul did not require complete abstinence from alcohol (later in this letter), but drunkenness (an over-indulgence in alcohol) was an absolute disqualification from leadership

[not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome]... someone who is always picking fights

[not a lover of money]... speaks for itself... an overseer who is greedy for financial gain is not going to be an effective overseer, and may possibly fall into sin as a result of pursuing the wrong thing

{Able to Teach}... an overseer doesn't have to be the best preacher or teacher in the world, but must be able to communicate doctrine and application clearly... this was probably their main job, as is still remains that today

{Proven leadership in his Family} [Husband of one wife]... we see this in the Deacon list later as well... literally... "a one-woman man"... in other words, he has demonstrated faithfulness in his marriage

[⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?]. . . so any pastor's kid has to be perfect... oh boy am I in trouble! (embarrassing child story)

{Mature in the Faith} - [⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.] – has to have a good relationship with Christ and enough experience that such a position will humble him and not lead him to think he is somehow better than everyone else.

{Good Reputation} – comes back around to character, known in the community they serve and people think highly of them

Even today... you can kind of see why all these things are important... I always heard what brings a pastor down? "Girls, Gold, Glory"

Something else I want you to see here...

No education requirements. No listing of skills (other than able to teach). This doesn't even sound like a job description. Again... that is because leadership in the Community of Faith is not like leadership in any other organization... it is a family!

So why did I take you through this? First, because we are studying Timothy, but also because **we want to make a change in the way we do things here at First Baptist...** over the coming month or so you will be hearing more about a constitution change that will alter the way our church is run.

You see, every early church we know of had more than one elder... they didn't just have one pastor overseeing and leading everything... they had multiple men working together to oversee the church... all of them looking to Christ. We would like to move more toward that kind of government here.

So, I wanted to go through these qualifications so you could begin thinking and praying about this... who are the elders in this church? Who are the men of Christ-like character

that are able to teach and have proven leadership in their family and are mature in the faith and have a good reputation? Begin praying about that now.

In fact, If you are a member here or planning to pursue membership, I want to invite you to come the next two Wednesday evenings (6:45) as we talk more about these proposed changes and what it would look like to be an elder-led church.

But... some of you might say, we already have that... we just call them Deacons. And to some extent that is true... but that is not what a Deacon is supposed to be. A Deacon is a servant leader, not an overseer. The word literally means “servant” as in someone who waits tables. They were another type of leader in the church and just as important. Paul mentions Deacons as well. Even though their role is different, listen to how similar the list of qualifications is...

1 Timothy 3 ⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued,^[c] not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise^[d] must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Deacons = servants, servant-leaders... is also a good thing to seek, but not for the sake of pride... because of the desire to serve.

Completely character requirements... still not drunkards or greedy. Still called to be blameless, which again doesn't mean perfect. Still **Christ-Like Character**

Still called to prove themselves in their own family.... Managing their households well... **Proven Leadership in the Family**

A few differences...

1. No requirement to be able to teach
Instead... **“hold to the faith”**

2. Don't have to be as mature in the faith

3. Addition of **wives / women**

Women – difficult to tell whether it is “women” or “wives”, disagreement even in Southern Baptist circles

...so we are proposing in this new constitution that a deacon at our church will serve alongside his wife in ministry to church members and the community. Therefore, when you think of people in this role, you will think of them as a couple.

So these Deacons help the elders minister to the community of faith... both offices being incredibly important and vital to the life of the church.

Important...

Notice that everything that is required of church leadership is elsewhere required of all Christians. So, let us demystify church leadership a little bit... leaders are not super-Christians...

Those that Paul wants to lead in the Community of Faith are not the smartest... but they know what they believe. They are not necessarily the most popular... but they have a good reputation. They aren't perfect... but it is clear they are pursuing Christ in their lives. Every

Application for today...

Clarify our structure...

- Our change in constitution to move to elder leadership as a church (come Wednesday)

Demystifying Church Leadership

- Respect and follow church leadership, but don't put them on a pedestal
- If you are called, step up into church leadership

Christ is the leader of this church... we like Superhero movies so much because deep down inside, we know we need someone to save us.

APPENDIX 14

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND FOR ELDER LEADERSHIP PRESENTED JULY 12, 2017 AT FBC

Part 1: How should the church be governed?

For the last two weeks, Val looked at the Christian's relationship with government. What about government inside the church? Do we need it? The goal tonight is to examine the biblical model of church government and possibly even see that the way we do things could use some tweaking.

Next Week - Part 2: Changing our Constitution

Let's start with the passage that brought us here from Sunday... 1 Tim 3... and then go from there. Remember, here, Paul is talking to Timothy about something called an "overseer"... Greek *episkopos*

1 Timothy 3 It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of ^[a]overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*. ^{2 [b]}An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not addicted to wine ^[c]or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. ⁴ *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity ⁵ (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), ⁶ *and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation ^[d]incurred by the devil. ⁷ And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

We don't really have much to go on based on this passage alone. It would seem that Paul assumed Timothy knew what this role was supposed to do and was simply telling Timothy what to look for in a man to fit the role of overseer. Here's what we can glean from this passage... Based on the context preceding it, it would seem that this overseer was an authority within the church and that Paul reserved the role for men (as we discussed two Sundays ago). It is also obvious that an overseer had to be a man of character and had to be able to teach (as we discussed last Sunday).

We are going to have to go elsewhere to see who this overseer is. Fortunately, we have some other interactions with Paul and Ephesus. One in particular gives us a little more information on the overseer.

Acts 20 ¹⁷ From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the *elders* of the church. ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them, ... So here he is meeting with some people from the church in Ephesus that he called “elders”... Greek *presbuteros* (we are looking for overseers)

After reminding them of their close relationship and all he had done in Ephesus, he says this...

²⁵ “And now, behold, I know that all of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will no longer see my face. ²⁶ Therefore, I ^[o]testify to you this day that I am ^[p]innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God. ²⁸ Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers*, to *shepherd* the church of God which He ^[p]purchased ^[s]with His own blood.

Did you catch the link there? He just told the “elders” that the Holy Spirit had made them “overseers.” Apparently, these were the men in the same role that Paul had written Timothy about.

Furthermore... he tells them to “shepherd” the church of God... Greek *poimen* which through the Latin is where we get our word, Pastor. So, It would appear that these three words all refer to the same position... elder / overseer / pastor.

Presbuteros = n. Elder
Episcopos = n. Overseer, Bishop
v. Oversee, exercise oversight
Poimen = n. Shepherd, Pastor
v. Shepherd, watch over

All refer to the same church office of Elder and in Ephesus, at least, there were more than one of them.

What was the office of elder?

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So... we will come back to the New Testament concept, but first, let's go back and look at where the idea of elder even comes from...

We first see a reference to elders in scripture at the end of Genesis in Jacob's funeral procession referring to the leaders of the household's of both Jacob and Pharaoh.

Genesis 50 ⁷ So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt...

You see this term was used not just to refer to Israel's leadership, but also the leadership of the tribes and nations around them. The Hebrew *zaqin* literally means “bearded one”... referring to older adult males. Several times, it simply means an older person, but the vast

majority of the time, it refers to leadership of a particular group. It was basically a picture of informal representative leadership probably derived from nomadic times... that from within this family group, this man is elder, and from within this family group, this man is elder, and so on.

Over the centuries, elders moved from an informal form of leadership to a more formal one. The elders are seen consulting with Moses.

Exodus 19⁷ So Moses came and called the **elders** of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him.

This type of leadership became more and more common after the land was settled throughout the books of Joshua, Judges, and Ruth... There were “elders” of a particular city and “elders” of Israel and “elders” of other nations.

Then, in 1 Samuel 8, it is the elders of Israel, collectively seen asking for a King.
1 Samuel 8⁴ Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah; ⁵ and they said to him, “Behold, you have grown old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint a king for us to judge us like all the nations.”

In the monarchy, elders aren't referenced as much but they are still there.
2 Samuel 5³ So all the **elders** of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them before the LORD at Hebron; then they anointed David king over Israel.

1 Kings 8³ Then all the **elders** of Israel came, and the priests took up the ark.

Ezekiel 20³ “Son of man, speak to the **elders** of Israel and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “Do you come to inquire of Me? As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “I will not be inquired of by you.”’”

Ezra 6¹⁴ And the **elders** of the Jews were successful in building through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they finished building according to the command of the God of Israel and the decree of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.

Matthew 21²³ When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the **elders** of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?”

Elders continue to challenge the early church. They are part of the group that tells Peter and John they cannot continue to preach about Jesus...

Acts 4²³ When they had been released, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them.

Then, all of the sudden... the term is used differently. The churches were giving in relief of a famine in Jerusalem...

Acts 11³⁰ And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the **elders**.

So now, this same word that has been used to refer to leadership throughout the Bible... is now referring to the leaders of the Christian movement... both the apostles and leaders inside each local church.

In fact, it is pretty clear that Paul's pattern was to not leave the church without leadership, but to make certain that he appointed elders... on his first missionary journey, Luke records him passing back through all the cities he had already visited (inc. Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch)...

Acts 14 ²³ When they had appointed **elders** for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

We also know Paul's pattern from his letters...
Tells Timothy and Titus to appoint elders...

Titus 1 ⁵ For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint **elders** in every city as I directed you, ⁶ *namely*, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. ⁷ For the ^[d]**overseer** must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,⁸ but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, ⁹ holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict.

As he is writing to the Philippians...

Philippians 1 ¹ To all the ^[a]saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, ^[b]including the overseers and deacons: ² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Then back to Ephesus...

Ephesians 4 ¹¹ And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.
(the only use of *poimen* as a noun)

It is pretty clear that Paul always left **more than one person** in authority. But we see this in more than just Paul's letters...

Hebrews 13 ¹⁷ Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. ^[e]Let them do this with joy and not ^[f]with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

James 5 ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? *Then* he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, ^[k]anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord

1 Peter 5 ¹ Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as *your* fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, ² shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to *the will of God*;

Notice how Peter mirrors Luke's record of Paul saying goodbye to the Ephesian elders with these words that we have argued are synonymous... elders, shepherd, oversight.

Clear that elders were plural in the local church...

Jerusalem, Antioch in Syria, Lystra, Iconium, Pisidian Antioch, Ephesus, Philippi, church on the island of Crete, Churches being addressed in Hebrews, James, and Peter... All reference multiple elders without a clear example of even one church led by an individual pastor.

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So we don't really have a full modern job description of what an elder-pastor-overseer did, but based on the clues from these words and the context of the passages, the responsibilities of the elders in the early church could fall into three big categories...

1. Teaching – they were responsible for teaching the church the truth of the gospel... and teaching others to teach
2. Shepherding – they were responsible for the spiritual well-being and even discipline of the congregation
3. Leading – they were responsible for making the decision and determining the direction of the church

When it comes to authority and leading, many people, including our Baptist ancestors believed that the congregation as a whole had the final say in matters and that no one outside of the congregation should have authority over the local church. This is called congregationalism. They see this principle in several important passages of the church as a whole having authority. One example...

Matthew 18 ¹⁵ “If your brother sins^[k], go and ^[l]show him his fault ^[m]in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. ¹⁶ But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY ^[n]FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. ¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as ^[o]a Gentile and ^[p]a tax collector.

All of Paul's letters, except the pastorals and Philemon are written to the church as a whole. He wrote to the entire congregation about doctrinal matters and issues of discipline and direction... not just the elders.

Also... there is some evidence that the Greek word for appoint, *cheirotoneó*, meant “to elect by a show of hands” instead of “appoint by stretching out hands”

Congregationalists believe that the general tone of the New Testament shows that the local church as an autonomous body had the final authority on matters... while also cooperating with other churches.

Southern Baptists would fall into the group of denominations that are considered congregational. So based on the biblical study of elders that we just did AND our foundational beliefs in congregationalism, how should our church be governed?

Options...

Two Extremes... [models]

1. Full congregational – spiritual democracy... we vote on everything
 - This seems to ignore the call for some leadership
2. Elder-ruled – a group of men have absolute authority over doctrine, discipline, direction... including who is an elder
 - This seems to ignore congregational ideas

The common SBC way...

3. Pastor led with Deacon board, but the congregation still votes on most things
 - Unclear and Can go multiple different ways...
 1. Single elder leadership / rule - control
 2. Too congregational – vote on everything
 3. Confuses deacons with elders

The proposed new way for FBC that we believe to be biblical and balanced...

4. Elder-led, congregational
 - Men are approved as elders from within the congregation
 - Elders are given the authority to teach, shepherd, and lead the church
 - Lead Pastor serves as primary preacher and point person for Elders and overseer of day-to-day operations, but has no more formal authority than other Elders
 - Congregation still votes on major issues (elders, ministerial staff, other church leadership, constitution and by-law changes, annual budget, large expenditures)

(Many SBC churches are beginning to make the move in this direction)

Advantages of Elder-led, Congregational...

- more biblical in terminology and structure
- balance between appointed leadership and congregation
- more efficient and effective decision making
- provides both help and accountability to the pastor
- creates stability through more local leaders
- clarifies that Christ is the ultimate head of the church

APPENDIX 15

EXCERPTS FROM CONSTITUTION CHANGE FAQ'S MADE AVAILABLE AT FBC JULY 2017

What are the Constitution and By-Laws and why should they change?

The Constitution and By-Laws of a church are not required by scripture. We don't have to have these documents to assemble together and worship God and share His love with others. However, they are legally required to demonstrate who we are as an organization, why we exist, what we believe, who has authority, what it means to be a member and how we make decisions. It is also a good idea to write down the way we do things so that everyone in the organization is clear. These documents spell out the way in which we will operate as a church.

There are aspects of our current Constitution and By-laws that need to change for several reasons. We desire to update some of the language and methods to 1) better match biblical patterns, 2) make things more efficient, 3) better reflect how we already tend to operate, and 4) simplify the document to make it more usable.

Who decides whether or not they will be changed?

The membership of FBC will make the final decision whether or not these proposed changes will be made when they vote at a Business Meeting on August 13, 2017. According to our current constitution, two-thirds of those present at the meeting must approve of the change. It was announced at the February 12, 2017 Business Meeting that a change would be studied and the following committee was approved to recommend those changes: Gary Cooper, Teresa Caldwell, Cheryl Francis, Robin Patrick, and Greg LeHew. This group worked along with Pastor Josh and Pastor Val to formulate the proposed changes.

What are the major changes that are proposed?

Much of the Constitution and By-Laws stayed essentially the same, but there are several areas to note significant change. 1) First, the committee rewrote the "Church Covenant" included in the current Constitution and the "Membership Covenant" currently taught in the membership class into one "Membership Commitment." 2) Second, the government of the church will change to Elder-leadership while still remaining congregationally-governed. Along with this new government, other church leadership roles were clarified. 3) A third major change is the overall organizational structure of the church. What used to be a multitude of committees, most of which

focused on the administration of the organization will now be only a handful of departments that will mostly be focused on the mission of the church.

In addition to these major changes, a few areas were updated to better reflect current practice or clarified to simplify the documents. They were also reviewed to ensure language that protects us legally and updated where necessary.

What are Elders and what will they do? Who will they be?

The Elders are a biblical term for an office in the church that we commonly call “pastor.” However, the concept is a little different. In the early church, we always see multiple Elders within a single congregation with the possibility of one “point person” among them. As a group, they provided oversight, care, and teaching to the local church. We would like to match this biblical model by adding the position of Elders who will provide oversight, care, and teaching to our congregation. We plan to still have a Lead Pastor who will be the point person for the team and be the primary teacher but he will have no more formal authority than the other elders.

The Constitution does not specify how many Elders our church must have, but initially that number will probably be 5-7 men including the Lead Pastor. It can be a mix of paid staff and lay leaders, but the majority must be lay leaders. The selection of an Elder will come through the existing group of Elders and be approved by the congregation. Each Elder should be a man of character with proven leadership ability in his home, in our church, and in the community. He should be able to teach and willing to make the leadership of our church a priority in his life.

What about other leaders in the church... such as Deacons?

We will continue to have other leaders in the church, including Deacons. Deacons will now focus solely on ministry to individuals and families in our church and the community, similar to how Southern Baptist’s have understood Deacons in the past. They will no longer be a decision-making authority in the church, but can advise the Elders on various matters regarding the life of the church. If married, a Deacon is expected to work in tandem with his wife to carry out their ministry.

Other leaders will also be named and approved by the congregation. Teachers, Ministry Team Leaders, and those serving on committees will all be considered leaders in the church as they carry out their specific ministry tasks.

Will we still have business meetings? Will the congregation still vote on things?

Yes and no. Our regular meetings will now be called “Membership Meetings” and all active members will be encouraged to attend. They will happen at least once a quarter and will contain more than just business. Additional special business meetings may be called just as before. The congregation will still always vote on the following issues: Approval and dismissal of Elders, Lead Pastor, and Ministerial Staff; Approval of Committee members, Teachers, Deacons, and Ministry Team Leaders; the annual

budget; any unbudgeted expenditures over \$10,000; any real estate transactions; and any changes to the Constitution or By-Laws.

Do these changes mean we are no longer Southern Baptist? Won't this be different than other churches?

This model of leadership is indeed different than many of the Southern Baptist churches around us. However, that is changing. Many of the new churches started within the SBC are starting with an Elder-led model. Some existing churches are changing as well. This has come from an emphasis of the biblical example and the benefits that an Elder-led model can bring. Our church will remain Southern Baptist. Our beliefs have not changed even though our structure will change a little. We are still considered a congregational church and haven't changed anything that goes against the Baptist Faith and Message.

Will we still have a church staff?

Yes. There are several functions in a church of our size that would be quite difficult to accomplish with all volunteers. We will continue to employ both Ministerial Staff members and Support Staff members as needed to accomplish the mission and vision of the church. The Lead Pastor will continue to directly oversee the staff in day-to-day operations.

How will the church organizational structure change?

Currently, the organizational structure of the church is quite loose with a number of different committees. We will be separating those into Committees (specific administrative task, approved by the congregation) and Ministry Teams (ministry or administrative tasks, only leader is approved by congregation). Each Team will then be placed into one of six departments that will focus on general aspects of the church's mission: 1) Administration, 2) Worship, 3) Small Groups, 4) Member Care, 5) Family Ministry, 6) Outreach.

Other Questions?

Call or e-mail the church office with your question or concern and it will be forwarded to the committee.

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ABSTRACT

CHURCH TRANSITION TO PLURALITY OF ELDERS: A CASE STUDY

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A desire among evangelical churches in denominations such as the Southern Baptist Convention to return to biblical forms of leadership have led a number of churches to examine what seems to many to be the biblical model of a plurality of elders. Many new Southern Baptist church plants are starting with this type of polity, but some already established churches desire to make a transition in their church government as well. Some of these churches fail at this transition and experience discord. Some succeed and see great fruit. This case study examines one traditional Southern Baptist church's experience in transitioning from a single elder congregational model to a plurality of elders. The research examines the time before, during, and after the change in polity by surveying members, interviewing specific groups of the congregation, analyzing documents from during the transition, and through the observation of the researcher, who was a guiding participant in the change.

Chapter 1 introduces the research problem. Chapter 2 examines the foundation set by the precedent literature in the arguments for and against a plurality of elders along with a literature survey of organizational change focused on the church. Chapter 3 outlines the case study research methodology. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the findings of the research. The goal of this case study is to provide others with an illustration of best practices and challenges that a church may experience in a transition to plurality of elders and hopefully ease the path of change.

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