



Church Governance Seminar

Tuesday, February 6, 2024

Southlake, Texas

Healthy Church Governance

By Jimmy Witcher
Senior Pastor
Trinity Fellowship Church

"Healthy Church Governance" by Jimmy Witcher

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NASB are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. All rights reserved.



TrinityFellowship

Copyright © 2024 – All Rights Reserved

Trinity Fellowship Church
5000 Hollywood Rd
Amarillo, Texas 79118
806-355-8955
www.tfc.org

Table of Contents

- The Purpose of Church Government1
 - Corporate Government Versus Church Government..... 2
 - Hosting The Presence of God..... 4
 - Sharing the Burden of Leadership..... 4
 - Establishment of Church Doctrine 6
 - Formalizing the Church’s Governmental Structure 7
- The Core Elements of Theocratic Church Governance..... 9
 - Singular Headship 10
 - Plural Leadership 10
 - Local Accountability..... 11
 - Trans-Local Accountability and Input 11
 - Apostolic and Prophetic Guidance 12
- The Function of Theocratic Church Government15
 - Principle of Seeking the Counsel of God.....15
 - Principle of Limited Authority.....15
 - Principle of Unity..... 16
 - Principle of Lifetime Appointment 16
 - Principle of Honesty & Transparency17
 - Principle of Confidentiality17
 - Principle of Yielding 18
 - Principle of Self-Appointment..... 18
 - Principle of Absentee Agreement 19
 - Principle of Relationship Over Issues.....20
 - Elder Leave of Absence Policy20
 - Removal of an Elder.....21
- The Practice of Theocratic Government..... 23
 - The Vision 23
 - The Finances..... 23
 - The Values 25
 - The Policies 25

The Meetings	25
Senior Leader Oversight	27
Selecting and Training Elders	31
The Bylaws of the Church	35
Appendix	37
Board Resolution Creating Oversight Committee.....	39
Senior Pastor Activity-Based Job Description	41
Example Bylaws.....	43

The Purpose of Church Government

Church government is one of the most important aspects of church life, yet unfortunately, it is often one of the most neglected. It is not uncommon for a church to draft a set of bylaws to file with the state to pursue their 403b nonprofit status and never look at them again. But church government is too important to be relegated to an afterthought!

The spiritual and natural authority under which the church operates comes out of its government. Church government is the foundation upon which the church is built, and it sets the ceiling for the anointing – the authority – of God as it flows through the ministry of the church.

The blessings of God flow through his provision, protection, and perfect peace (shalom), and healthy church government provides for the flow of God's provision, protection, and stabilizing peace throughout the organization. In other words, a healthy church government facilitates the flow of God's blessing to the organization. And unfortunately, the opposite is true! A missing or unhealthy governmental structure limits the blessing of God.

Jesus introduced the concept of “church” with his disciples at Caesarea Philippi. He asked a critical question, “Who do the people say I am?” He followed their answers with another question, “Who do you say I am?” Now, the stakes were high. Jesus is about to begin his journey to the cross. This is a turning point in his ministry as he moves to finish the work of redemption he came to usher in, and he needs his disciples to start getting it!

With a fresh revelation from the Father, Peter answers, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God!” And following that confession, Jesus begins to talk about the church he is going to build:

¹⁸ Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means ‘rock’), and upon this rock, I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. ¹⁹ And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.” (Matthew 16:18,19)

The Greek word for church is ekklesia (or ecclesia), which means “legislative assembly.” In Jesus’ day, this was the secular word used to refer to citizens of a city gathering to decide political issues. This fits perfectly with Jesus’ discussion on “keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.” Thus, the local church is the legislative body representing the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, built upon the foundation of the confession of Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus is the head, and the church is his body expanding and watching over his Kingdom.

²² God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. ²³ And the church is his body; it is

*made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.
(Ephesians 1:22,23)*

Church government exists to facilitate the work of Christ through his church. It is an expression of heaven released on the Earth. So, what is church government, and what makes it healthy – or not? Recognizing the differences between corporate and church governance is an excellent place to begin.

Corporate Government Versus Church Government

Corporate governance establishes a framework of rules, practices, and processes by which a company is directed and controlled. It primarily aims to ensure that a company's management acts in the best interests of shareholders/stakeholders while maintaining transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct. Thus, a corporate board of directors is charged with:

- Protecting Shareholder / Stakeholder Interests
- Ensuring Corporate Transparency and Disclosure
- Holding Executives Accountable
- Managing Risk by Identifying and Mitigating Risk Factors
- Ensuring Compliance with Laws and Regulations
- Ensuring the Ethical Conduct of the Corporation
- Creating Long-Term Value By Focusing on Shareholder and Stakeholder Interests

Overall, corporate governance is designed to maintain the integrity and credibility of a company, promoting responsible business practices and ensuring that the organization operates in a manner that benefits its shareholders/stakeholders. **Church government** is quite different! One of the biggest challenges today with church governments is elders who approach the governing task from a corporate governance perspective.

THE PURPOSE OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT IS TO HEAR AND OBEY GOD AND EFFECTIVELY STEWARD THE RESOURCES OF THE LOCAL CHURCH FOR THE EFFECTIVE ADVANCEMENT OF HIS KINGDOM ON EARTH.

While local church governments establish a framework of rules, practices, and processes in ways similar to corporate governance counterparts, church government is focused on representing heaven to earth, not congregation members to staff leadership. Corporate governance protects the interest of the *shareholder*. The church belongs to *Christ*. Thus, church governance seeks expand his kingdom through the unique expression of the local church.

This form of governance is called **Theocratic Governance**, a partnership between man and heaven to expand heaven's kingdom on earth. Theocratic governance recognizes Christ as the head of the church. Instead of protecting shareholder interest, theocratic governance seeks to know and advance God's interest. Rather than mitigating risk, church boards practicing theocratic governance lean into faith. Rather than seeking sustainability and long-term value, church boards practicing theocratic governance are designed to create an organization with a

kingdom and cultural impact. While church leaders need to be held accountable, they are to be held accountable to God and his call, not to the congregation and their expectations.

Healthy Church Government Focuses on Stewardship, Not Control

In the early church, we see an example of healthy church government. In response to the congregation's complaints, the Twelve Apostles refused to leave their first responsibility of the Word of God and prayer to serve the people. Instead, they wisely told them to choose qualified leaders to serve the needs of the people.

But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. The Greek-speaking believers complained about the Hebrew-speaking believers, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. ² So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. They said, "We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program. ³ And so, brothers, select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will give them this responsibility. ⁴ Then we apostles can spend our time in prayer and teaching the word."

(Acts 6:1-4)

Jesus uses the stewardship metaphor to describe believers' role in the kingdom. Healthy church governance is based upon stewardship – the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one's care. So, what are the resources church boards are tasked with?

- Leaders – the Senior Pastor and Their Team
- Vision
- Values & Beliefs of the Organization
- Finances
- Congregation

Healthy church government seeks to steward the leader and their vision in alignment with the values and beliefs within the confines of the resources available to effectively activate the congregation to advance God's kingdom on earth.

The line between stewardship and control can be blurry – especially when talking about a senior leader and the eldership. If the eldership seeks to protect the leader – even from themselves – they generally operate within their role as stewards. If they want to protect the church or their own personal ideals *from* the leader, they are usually exercising control. Control should be reserved for when the leader's actions are harmful or clearly against the vision or values of the church.

The early Apostles realized the most important thing they could do for the church was to seek God and minister out of what He gave them. The early church thrived in response to its

leadership, and God greatly blessed it. Many well-meaning church leaders serve the needs of the people first and fear men more than they fear God. Healthy church governments protect the leaders and the vision by stewarding them and representing God to the congregation, not the congregation to the leadership.

Hosting The Presence of God

One of the most essential elements of theocratic church government is that all decision-making begins with a submitted relationship with God. God only blesses decisions, plans, and visions that begin with him. He doesn't bless good ideas – He blesses his ideas. The most crucial question elderships must regularly answer is, “What is God saying?” While it is essential to discuss the practical matters of an issue and utilize the collective wisdom and experience of everyone in the group, the ultimate issue is what God is saying.

*⁹ Then Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel climbed up the mountain. ¹⁰ There, they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet, there seemed to be a surface of brilliant blue lapis lazuli, as clear as the sky itself. ¹¹ And though these nobles of Israel gazed upon God, he did not destroy them. In fact, they ate a covenant meal, eating and drinking in his presence!
(Genesis 24:9-11)*

Eldership is a supernatural calling, and eldership meetings are intended to be supernatural events. Jesus says, “For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them.” (Matthew 18:20) Elders’ meetings are intended to be supernatural events where the Presence of God is manifest and his wisdom and direction for the church are revealed.

With this call, elders are responsible for seeking God, maintaining a personal life centered around devotion and purity, and holding God’s word over their desires and preferences.

Sharing the Burden of Leadership

Theocratic governance has a principle of singular headship and plural leadership. The vision of God for a specific church is given to the senior pastor and vetted through the eldership. This pattern is demonstrated throughout scripture.

- Moses and the 70 elders
- Jesus and the Apostles
- James and the Council of Jerusalem
- Paul – “Even if others think I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you.” (1 Corinthians 9:2)
- Timothy & Titus
- 2 John – “I am writing to the chosen lady and to her children...” (2 John 1)
- Revelation 2 & 3 – The church letters were written to “the messenger” (not messengers)

While variances will exist from one church to another, staying true to the principles of scripture is vital for a healthy church government. Singular headship means God gives the vision for the church to the senior leader, who carries the responsibility for executing that vision through the staff, leaders, and congregation.

The eldership is responsible for vetting and validating the vision and the timing and resourcing of it by the word of God – both Scriptural and prophetic. In other words, is this vision Biblical, and is it what God is saying to us for now?

[Moses said to the Lord,]¹⁴ “I can’t carry all these people by myself! The load is far too heavy!¹⁵ If this is how you intend to treat me, just go ahead and kill me. Do me a favor and spare me this misery!”

*¹⁶ Then the Lord said to Moses, “Gather before me seventy men who are recognized as elders and leaders of Israel. Bring them to the Tabernacle to stand there with you. ¹⁷ I will come down and talk to you there. I will take some of the Spirit that is upon you, and I will put the Spirit upon them also. They will bear the burden of the people along with you, so you will not have to carry it alone.” ... ²⁴ So Moses went out and reported the Lord’s words to the people. He gathered the seventy elders and stationed them around the Tabernacle. ²⁵ And the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke to Moses. Then he gave the seventy elders the same Spirit that was upon Moses. And when the Spirit rested upon them, they prophesied.
(Numbers 11:14-17, 24-25)*

Almost every leader would say the vision is one of their heaviest loads. Elders have a supernatural ability to “bear the burden” along with the senior leader. For this to happen, the elders must “own” the vision. They are not to *help* the pastor accomplish his vision. Instead, they are to work together to achieve their vision. The difference is not one of subtleties. As a pastor once said, “When it comes to breakfast, the chicken participated, but the pig was committed.” Bearing the burden of the vision means owning it, praying for it, and working towards it. It means wanting to see it happen with passion and purpose.

Another load facing many senior pastors is the pressure of finances and debt. Elders bear this burden by helping the leadership manage effectively, prioritize, and seek the Lord for strategies in financing the vision. The Lord provides provision when it is his vision. Elders serve the organization by approving budgets, reviewing out-of-budget expenditures, and formulating capital plans.

Beyond vision and finances, there are numerous other burdens leaders regularly face. Healthy church governance seeks to identify those burdens as they appear and bear them together.

Establishment of Church Doctrine

Since the beginning of the early church, church government has been a critical element in the church's theological formation. Chapter 15 of Acts shows an example of early church government at work. The Judaizer crowd in Antioch is looking to force Gentiles to accept circumcision, and Paul and Barnabas are sent to Jerusalem to get answers. The Apostles and elders meet together to resolve this issue. After much discussion, Peter stands up and shares what he has witnessed, encouraging the group not to add another burden to the Gentiles. Next, Paul and Barnabas share what they have experienced, and finally, James brings the point home, quoting Amos 9.

While we don't have much more of the story, it is clear this was an intense debate with the potential to split the church. It is also clear that the assembled Apostles and elders were united following the discussions. A new policy for Gentile believers was established and published to the churches:

²⁸ "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements: ²⁹ You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well." (Acts 15:28,29)

Elders are responsible for establishing and defending the foundational beliefs of the local church. The Apostle Paul makes this clear in his instructions to his spiritual son, Titus:

⁵ I left you on the island of Crete so you could complete our work there and appoint elders in each town as I instructed you. ... ¹⁰ For there are many rebellious people who engage in useless talk and deceive others. This is especially true of those who insist on circumcision for salvation. ¹¹ They must be silenced because they are turning whole families away from the truth by their false teaching. (Titus 1:5,10-11)

Statement of Faith

A church's statement of faith is critically important as it outlines its foundational beliefs. (As we will discuss later, it is recommended that the statement of faith be incorporated into the organization's bylaws.) The statement of faith contains the core beliefs all must agree to to walk in unity. As Amos says, "*Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?*" (Amos 3:3)

Generally speaking, the statement of faith should be as specific as possible on the key points of doctrine while being as broad as possible (or silent) on debatable issues. Recognizing that an

inability to accept the beliefs held by the statement of faith disqualifies an individual from being a part of the body, limiting the statement's scope is critical.

Holding to standards relative to the Trinity, the inerrancy of Scripture, the atonement of Christ, and the like are essential. However, parsing between Armenian and Calvinistic views of grace, for example, maybe too limiting. Walking between “This is what I believe” and “This is the range of what we can believe and still walk together in unity” is essential for elderships establishing doctrine. Today, including statements on marriage and gender can be significant.

Throughout church history, statements of faith have been handed down as creeds. Likely, one of the first creeds was passed on by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians:

³I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said.

⁵He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. (1 Corinthians 15:3-5)

This creed was a statement shared and repeated in all the churches. It established the framework for the New Testament's doctrine of grace. Christ, the Messiah, died for our sins. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day – all in accordance with Scripture. As proof, he was seen by Peter and the Twelve. Clear. Concise. Simple.

The church adopted the Nicene Creed in 325 AD, later modifying it in 381 AD. Whether a church uses a creed or other form of a statement of faith, it is the role of the elders to define those beliefs and defend them to the local body.

Formalizing the Church's Governmental Structure

In addition to establishing the statement of faith for the church, church boards are responsible for formalizing and maintaining the governmental structure. This includes creating and updating the church bylaws, appointing and removing elders, and, if applicable, officers of the corporation. More on this topic will be presented in later chapters.

The Core Elements of Theocratic Church Governance

Over the years, the local church has experienced numerous forms of church government. While scripture is relatively silent on what the “right” form of government is, we can see experientially how important church government is for the health and longevity of the church. This is especially true as demonization is giving way to independence.

- A. **Episcopal** – Strong centralized control with disempowered local leaders. Often, the organization owns the land and buildings and the clergy's retirement plans.
- B. **Presbyterian** – Strong local elder body with disempowered singular headship. The senior leader generally does not have a vote on the eldership and serves at the pleasure of the elders.
- C. **Congregational / Democratic** – Strong congregational control with elected elders and deacons. This form is modeled after corporate governance, with the elected board representing the congregation (stakeholders) to the leadership.
- D. **Oligarchy** – A very empowered small group or single leader governs the church, disempowering congregants and producing a lack of ownership. From a practical perspective, the leader has all authority.
- E. **Multi-Functional** – The governance role is divided among three or more unrelated groups. Often, the Elders support the senior leader with the spiritual needs of the church. Trustees oversee the financial aspects, serving as the IRS-qualified board, and independent overseers – often pastoral friends of the Senior Pastor – oversee the Pastor. (Functionally, it can be similar to oligarchy.)
- F. **Theocratic** – Single Headship and plural leadership with Apostolic and Prophetic Guidance. An empowered single leader with an empowered elder body and trans-local accountability and input.

Often, church governments are formed – or reformed – in response to the abuse or failure of the previous establishment. Churches that experience an abusive senior leader may shift from an oligarchy to a Presbyterian form of government with the elders firmly in control. Senior leaders who experience the pain of a congregational government may plant a church with a multi-functional government, ensuring that they are only held accountable to people they know and trust who are not a part of their organization. These overreactions, while understandable, only move from one ditch and set of problems to another.

While no form of government is perfect, Trinity Fellowship Church's experience shows that theocratic governance offers the best balance of empowerment and accountability, freedom and transparency. Recognizing that the purpose of church government is to effectively steward the resources of the local church for the effective advancement of God's kingdom here on earth,

theocratic government is structured to identify and facilitate God's will for the local congregation. The following are the core elements of theocratic governance:

Singular Headship

In the theocratic governance model, the senior leader is the singular head of the church. The elders have governmental authority only when gathered in an official meeting. (Elders do have sacerdotal functions, including praying for the sick, performing marriage and funeral services, laying on of hands, and the like that operate outside of the elders' meetings.)

The senior leader, by design, is the Chairman of the Board of Elders. Outside of an elders' meeting, the senior leader represents the will of the eldership to the congregation, staff, and community. They are the singular head of the staff and lay leadership teams. The senior leader is primarily responsible for establishing the church's vision and direction and leading the staff and congregation according to the policies and values established by the elder board.

The Bible is full of the concept of singular headship. From Moses to the Judges to the Kings to Jesus. Even the Apostle Paul asserted his leadership over the churches he planted. *"Even if others think I am not an apostle, I certainly am to you. You yourselves are proof that I am the Lord's apostle."* (1 Corinthians 9:2). The Biblical pattern of leadership is that God gives his vision through his appointed leader, vetted through the governmental structure.

Plural Leadership

The board of elders is responsible for stewarding the senior leader, the vision, and the church's resources. As such, they share the burden of the vision, establish the policies and values that govern leadership's decision-making, and hold the leadership accountable. This is accomplished through the practical actions of:

- Praying for the church, leadership, and congregation,
- Approving the annual budget,
- Regularly reviewing organizational performance to budget,
- Setting policies for out-of-budget spending limits,
- Approving the vision and strategy of the organization,
- Regularly reviewing organizational performance to the vision and strategy,
- Setting leadership decision-making policy,
- Establishing church doctrine,
- Establishing the church values,
- Adding, removing, and disciplining fellow elders,
- Maintaining the governance functionality (reviewing bylaws, for example),
- Overseeing the senior leader and, most importantly,
- Hearing God for his timing and direction.

In addition to these responsibilities, elderships may occasionally have additional duties such as running capital campaigns or organizing health care plans. Often, individual elders have expertise that can serve the senior leader – in banking, finance, real estate, insurance, law, and the like. In these cases, the elder needs to recognize that they are operating under the authority of the senior leader for a specific function and not as a representative of the eldership to the leader.

Local Accountability

Here is a fundamental truth both senior leaders and elderships must recognize: people are only as accountable as they want to be. This is why local accountability is so critically important for a healthy church government. (And it is why the multi-functional model of government often moves towards oligarchy, as the local elders and trustees have no absolute authority over the senior leader.) Additionally, this is why the church's financial and spiritual vision components should be controlled by one body.

Often, church leaders fail morally, bringing reproach to the church and harm to the kingdom. Whether it is sexual sin or fiscal impropriety, the failures can almost always be traced back to failures in the governmental structure of the church or organization. Local accountability is about a small group of highly vested individuals with a clear view of the organization and the people leading it.

Senior leaders need to be accountable to the local elder board. This can be accomplished by establishing a Senior Leader Oversight Committee comprising non-staff elders. (More on this later.)

Trans-Local Accountability and Input

Local elders have one distinct disadvantage – in most cases, they have never led a church. While they often have immense experience in the business world, they can be ill-equipped in some aspects of governance for the local church. How much should the pastor be paid? Does this vision make sense in the context of a church? Is our congregation healthy as compared to the church at large?

For these questions and more, it is advisable to have trans-local accountability and input. This can be accomplished by appointing Apostolic Elders. These elders are “friends of the ministry” who are often leaders in the greater Body of Christ. Their official capacity is quite limited (more on this in the discussion on bylaws below); however, their unofficial service is quite powerful.

They serve as advisors to the senior leader and, as needed, eldership. They understand the church and the business of the church and can speak wisdom and guidance in specific situations. They also provide accountability by observing the church and the senior leader with a “trained eye” over time, providing critical insight.

Apostolic and Prophetic Guidance

In addition to Apostolic Elders, it is helpful for a church to embrace apostolic and prophetic guidance.

¹⁹ So now you Gentiles are no longer strangers and foreigners. You are citizens, along with all of God's holy people. You are members of God's family.

²⁰ Together, we are his house, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. And the cornerstone is Christ Jesus himself. ²¹ We are carefully joined together in him, becoming a holy temple for the Lord.

(Ephesians 2:19-21)

¹¹ Now, these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. ¹² Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ. ¹³ This will continue until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord, measuring up to the full and complete standard of Christ. ¹⁴ Then, we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. (Ephesians 4:11-14)

²⁸ Here are some of the parts God has appointed for the church: first are apostles, second are prophets, third are teachers, then those who do miracles, those who have the gift of healing, those who can help others, those who have the gift of leadership, those who speak in unknown languages. ²⁹ Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? Do we all have the power to do miracles? ³⁰ Do we all have the gift of healing? Do we all have the ability to speak in unknown languages? Do we all have the ability to interpret unknown languages? Of course not! ³¹ So you should earnestly desire the most helpful gifts. (1 Corinthians 12:28-31)

Two of the essential gifts in the church are apostles and prophets. Both of these gifts exist to establish the foundations of church government. The apostle, or "sent one," has the supernatural ability to replicate kingdom DNA in churches and to ensure that, regardless of the individual distinctiveness in a local body of believers, the essential standards of doctrine exist and are practiced.

The prophet has the supernatural ability to "tell forth or beforehand." The prophet can authenticate God's work and bring forth pertinent revelation and direction to assist local leaders and churches in finding God's specific will and avoid future problems.

Local churches and elderships can access apostolic and prophetic giftings through relational rather than organizational means. These individuals may or may not be part of the Apostolic Elder team. Individuals can be asked to speak annually or regularly with the senior leader. Effective apostles have a verifiable track record of planting and pastoring churches. They can build healthy, growing churches in any community or culture upon the foundation of a stable government. Prophets bear the nature and character of Christ and have a verifiable track record of hearing God accurately and giving biblical advice that works. Apostles mostly inject kingdom DNA that transfers from church to church, while prophets mainly provide personalized guidance for a specific situation and body of believers.

The Function of Theocratic Church Government

As stated above, the purpose of church government is to hear and obey God and effectively steward the resources of the local church for the effective advancement of his kingdom on earth. Hearing God and effectively governing the local church is the essence of theocratic church government. This process is guided by ten principles that facilitate healthy discussions designed to hear God, operate in his timing, and release the church to advance in his purposes.

Principle of Seeking the Counsel of God

Eldership has a spiritual and a practical function, with the former always taking priority. Each elder brings unique experiences and specific knowledge, contributing to the group's collective wisdom; however, God does not always follow human wisdom! The purpose of elders' meetings is to get the counsel of God. Elders must first answer the question, "What is God saying about this?" before they address the issue of "What are we going to do about it?"

Principle of Limited Authority

As mentioned, elders *only* have governmental authority during a duly authorized elders' meeting. This is critically important when we remember that the primary purpose of an elders' meeting is to get the counsel of God. Each elder is charged with seeking God and sharing what they believe God is saying. Often, this process is like watching a Polaroid slowly develop. One elder will share a perspective, then another, and so on. Often, robust disagreement is a part of the process!

The Apostle Paul was discussing the manifestations of the Holy Spirit's gifts in the local church when he said, "Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror..." (1 Corinthians 13:12). The process of finding the counsel of God is much like that! Each elder brings a piece, and the process intends to seek out what God is saying.

Often, during meetings where there is much disagreement on the direction God is giving, there can be much discussion, debate, and sometimes expressions of frustration, but the process is worth it! Jesus says ask, seek, and knock. There are not always easy answers, and God loves for us to pursue him. Often, a sudden peace floods the room when the answer is discovered.

And because it is the process of hearing God that is so crucial to the effectiveness of theocratic government, the quorum of elders present for the discussion must make the decision. This process would never work if two or three different groups of elders gathered together to address issues. Only collectively does the process of hearing God function. (This also means that elders absent from the discussion by default must agree with the decision of the elders in the meeting. See Principle of Absentee Agreement below.)

Principle of Unity

God loves unity, and it is something very different from agreement. Two people can agree to disagree, but that is not unity. Unity means that everyone agrees not only cognitively but also that they have come to desire the same thing. Unity is a connection of both heart and head.

¹ *How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony!*
² *For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil that was poured over Aaron's head, that ran down his beard and onto the border of his robe.* ³ *Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon that falls on the mountains of Zion.*
And there, the Lord has pronounced his blessing, even life everlasting.
(Psalm 133)

Every decision made by a theocratic governing elder board is made in unity. (The bylaws provide a small number of specific exceptions to this principle. More on that later.) Under the principle of Seeking the Counsel of God and the principle of Limited Authority, we have the principle of Unity. If every elder is honestly seeking the will of God on an issue, and the group cannot come to unity, there can only be one explanation: Someone is not hearing God rightly. But who? It cannot be assumed that the majority is hearing God and the minority – of the individual – is not.

All it means is that the group has not yet rightly divined the word of God on the particular issue at hand, and they need to wait. This is the moment where great faith is required! The principle of Unity – and how elderships handle it when they are not in it – drives theocratic government and is often responsible for the leadership walking in the timing of God. It may not mean “no” and might very much mean “not now.” It can also mean God is saying, “You’re missing a part of the puzzle you cannot yet see.”

Principle of Lifetime Appointment

Elders in theocratic government are appointed for life. This is important because it establishes the importance of maintaining healthy relationships. Eldering in theocratic government is a covenant relationship, and issues must be handled. When elders have specific terms, issues can be avoided, and the board can “wait out” the problem until the end of the elder’s term. In a theocratic government system, issues must be dealt with promptly.

As churches grow and mature over time, it may make sense for them to establish guidelines for elder service. First, the appointment should be for the life of the anointing for the appointment. For example, after many years of service, an elder may feel that the grace is off for them to continue in their governance capacity.

Also, a church may establish guidelines for elders to serve based on age. For example, a church might say they will not appoint elders younger than 35 and ask elders who turn 70 to consider

retirement to make room for upcoming elders. This methodology serves the church well by keeping the government from “aging out.”

²³ The Lord also instructed Moses, ²⁴ “This is the rule the Levites must follow: They must begin serving in the Tabernacle at the age of twenty-five, ²⁵ and they must retire at the age of fifty. ²⁶ After retirement, they may assist their fellow Levites by serving as guards at the Tabernacle, but they may not officiate in the service. This is how you must assign duties to the Levites.”
(Numbers 8:23-26)

One suggestion is to create a class of “Legacy Elders.” Elders who have served faithfully as governing elders can graduate to a class of legacy elders where they no longer bear the burden of governance but are still included in the laying on of hands, prayer, and ministry.

Principle of Honesty & Transparency

For theocratic governance to work, elders must commit to honesty and transparency in elder meetings. This seems obvious, but the practicality of it goes beyond “speaking truthfully.” Being honest in seeking God's counsel means elders must share what they think, feel, and hear, even if uncertain or unclear. Remember, it is the process of hearing God together that brings the counsel of God.

In practice, it can be easy for most of the elders present to listen to the more outspoken members of the group. However, this leaves the group at a distinct disadvantage, as being outspoken differs from being right. For theocratic governance to function correctly, each elder must be willing to share their thoughts, even if they are incomplete. It is acceptable to start by saying, “I’m not sure where I sit on this issue right now, but ...”

The principle of Honesty & Transparency also means that each elder is responsible for sharing what they want and need to say *in the meeting*. To wait until after the meeting and say to another elder, “Well, I’m not sure I agree with ...” is illegal and breaks the group's trust.

Principle of Confidentiality

To build a culture that fosters honesty and transparency requires a high degree of confidentiality. What is spoken of in elders’ meetings must remain in the meeting. Board notes should confer the results of the discussions, not the process of achieving them. As the goal is to find the counsel of God on any given issue, the result should be noted as such – even if unity is not reached and the answer is “not now.”

Proper notation for an affirmative answer may look like, “The elders discussed _____ and concluded that it is God’s will for the church to do _____.” Proper notation for a “not now”

answer might look like, “After much discussion concerning _____, the elders determined to table the discussion till _____.”

Often, the issue of spouses comes up in the discussion around the principle of confidentiality. Each church must find its own policy here, which usually depends on individual spousal relationships. Some spouses have the fortitude to know and process the specifics of discussions in a healthy way, while others do not. It is essential for the elder who might share information with their spouse to remember that the information comes with the weight of confidentiality and the weight of responsibility to keep their heart right.

Principle of Yielding

Within the principle of Unity comes the principle of Yielding. Frequently, in a discussion, an elder might find themselves uncomfortable with the direction of the discussion. When the elders are in the extreme minority, they should consider the root source of their disagreement. As discussed in the principle of Unity above, this does not mean that the elder should go along with the majority; however, it suggests they may want to ask themselves, “Am I hearing God on this issue, or am I just uncomfortable with it?”

For many issues, the individual elder may hold personal values that are different from others on the board. For example, some elders may be quite comfortable with debt while others are not. Some may have a passion for world missions, while others have a burden for the poor locally. Some elders naturally take decisive action on conflict issues, while others may be more mercy-motivated. In such circumstances, personal values – valid for individual decisions – may make it difficult for elders to hear God.

In such cases, the elder should look to the group and ask themselves, “Do I trust these other elders more than I trust myself on this issue?” The elder should yield to the group's consensus if the answer is yes.

That said, if the elder (or elders) believe God is saying something different, they have the responsibility to stick by their position. No elder should ever feel bullied or run over by the group. A vital role for the board's chairman is to protect elders in the minority of decisions yet feel strongly they are hearing God on the subject.

Principle of Self-Appointment

In the theocratic government model, current elder boards select new members. The criteria for elder selection is discussed in greater detail in a later chapter, but simply put, elders should meet the Biblical qualifications for eldership and have a demonstrated gift of governance. Once these two qualifiers are established, the only remaining issue is the question of God's will. Is God calling this individual to be an elder at this time?

Considering the principles of Unity and Lifetime Appointment, it is critical that the existing elder board carefully vet any new elders. This is also why the existing elders must select new elders rather than holding congregational nominations or votes. Theocratic government is

always “heaven down” and not “congregation up.” That is not to say that congregational input is completely ignored; however, the board should not rely on the congregation or transfer their responsibility to the congregation when making decisions – especially the selection and appointment of new elders.

The Bible is silent on issues such as the number of elders and the ratio of staff to non-staff elders. It is up to each church and individual elder board to hear God and make determinations for themselves. That said, here are a few guidelines to consider:

- Many church bylaws prescribe a minimum number of board members – usually in the three to five range. When considering elder board size, church boards should consider the weight of leadership. Larger boards carry the load more easily. Larger boards bring more expertise into the room; larger boards are likelier to have broader perspectives of the church's ministry. That said, the larger the board, the more insights that need to be considered and the more challenging it can be to achieve unity.
- A healthy ratio of staff and non-staff elders is beneficial for the practical function of the church government. Having too few staff elders – for example, only the senior pastor – can limit the view the eldership has into the function of the church. It also increases the burden on the senior leader to communicate the board's decisions effectively to the staff. Having too many staff elders can put too much influence on the senior leader.
- Churches looking to expand their elder boards should move slowly and deliberately. Relationships take time to develop, and each change or addition to the elder board will take time for the group to adjust.

Principle of Absentee Agreement

As discussed above in the principle of Seeking the Counsel of God, working together to hear the voice and direction of God takes time and effort. Elders who cannot attend a specific elders' meeting miss out on the discussions, the flow, and most importantly, the sense of God's will manifested through the decision-making process. Thus, elders who miss a meeting are bound to the group's decision regardless of how they may feel about the decision.

Here, the principle of Unity also kicks in. The absentee elder must be in unity with the group – meaning they accept the decision, fully support it, and put their will behind it – even though they were not a part of that decision.

Similarly, absentee elders cannot be given a voice in the meeting. For example, an elder who cannot attend sends an email with their comments on an issue to the chairman or other elder to be read in the room. This practice would violate the principle of Seeking the Counsel of God.

The one exception to this is when the absentee elder has specific knowledge that would be helpful to the group as they work together to hear God's counsel. For example, an insurance agent may have particular expertise on current market conditions that would benefit the group,

considering various insurance options. Note that the absentee elder's input is limited to their specific knowledge and not meant to be what they "believe God is saying" on the issue.

Principle of Relationship Over Issues

As an eldership works through these principles, human conflict is inevitable. The price of unity is often a robust discussion! Each elder must regularly check their heart. Remembering that the group is seeking to find the counsel of God rather than any individual or group of individuals trying to "win" an argument is essential.

¹² Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. ¹³ Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace. And always be thankful. (Colossians 3:12-15)

Part of the board's chairman's role is to facilitate the discussion, moving from conversations around the facts towards the primary purpose of Seeking the Counsel of God on the issue. As conflict arises in a meeting, elders should engage one another with honesty and transparency. With the singular exception of matters of doctrine as outlined in the statement of faith, elders operate under the principle of Relationship Over Issues. This principle means elders approach each discussion with the recognition that their relationships are too meaningful to sacrifice over any individual issue!

Elder Leave of Absence Policy

When considering the principle of Lifetime Appointment to eldership, it is recommended that church bylaws provide a provision for elders to take a leave of absence. Such an absence would remove the elder from the elder rolls for a specified period – usually a minimum of three and a maximum of six months. A leave of absence relieves the elder from the burden of governance, allowing them to deal with any personal issues they may face.

There are two types of absence: voluntary and involuntary. The elder requests a voluntary leave of absence. Generally, a voluntary leave of absence is requested for personal reasons such as a health issue, family issue, or a uniquely busy season of life. Involuntary leave of absence is requested by the chairman and presented to the elder board for approval. (This is one of the unique circumstances where unanimity is not required as the affected elder's vote is nullified.)

Involuntary leave may be requested by the chairman for situations that involve legal, immoral, or un-Christ-like behavior by the spouse or children of the elder, which have public implications.

Additionally, marriage issues or family trauma related to the elder could be cause for an involuntary absence.

It is important to note that in both cases – voluntary and involuntary – leave of absence is not punishment but rather a grace given to the elder for the opportunity to focus on the personal issue at hand without the weight of governance.

Removal of an Elder

Church bylaws must detail the requirements for the removal of an elder. Generally, this is one of the unique circumstances where unanimity is not required. This is logical as the elder being removed would be forced to vote for their removal, and refusal to do so would allow them to remain an elder. Thus, something like a two-thirds majority is recommended to remove an elder.

Elders can be removed for violations of the qualifications of an elder as listed in Scripture, for failure to agree with the Statement of Faith, or for failure to operate under the principles of theocratic governance.

¹⁹ Do not listen to an accusation against an elder unless it is confirmed by two or three witnesses. ²⁰ Those who sin should be reprimanded in front of the whole church; this will serve as a strong warning to others. (1 Timothy 5:19,20)

The Practice of Theocratic Government

As discussed above in *The Core Elements of Theocratic Government*, theocratic government depends upon the functions of singular headship of the senior leader and the plural leadership of the eldership. For these functions to work together, the elders need both visibility *into* the organization and authority *over* the organization to lead. The senior leader needs the delegated authority and responsibility to execute the day-to-day leadership of the church.

By default, the senior leader is the chairman of the board of elders and is responsible for conducting the board meetings. The board may appoint a vice-chairman with limited authority to call elders' meetings in the chairman's absence to conduct church business.

Church leadership issues can be divided into four aspects: vision, finances, values, and policies. The elder board has ultimate authority in validating and flushing out the senior leader's vision, approving the annual budget and monitoring performance, establishing values for decision-making within the organization, and establishing the policies that govern the organization.

The depth to which elder boards operate in these four areas will depend upon the size and life stage of the church and the leadership. Young churches with young, inexperienced leaders may require greater elder involvement, while more mature churches and mature, proven leaders may need less. Within this is the tension between singular headship and plural leadership, and healthy church governments operate with a level of self-awareness and adjust accordingly.

The Vision

The senior leader is responsible for presenting the church's vision to the board of elders for vetting and approval. Recognizing that the eldership operates under the principle of Seeking the Counsel of God, vetting the vision confirms God's direction and allocates the necessary resources. God always provides the provision for the vision!

The vision for the church sets its direction and brings alignment to the leadership. It may be as simple as a vision statement or as advanced as a multistep strategic plan.

The Finances

One of the critical ways elders work with the senior leader is by financing the vision. There is often a natural tension between the visionary leader's dream and the resources available to execute that dream. By having carefully constructed systems around finances, elder boards can help guide and direct the expression of the vision.

Annual Budget

The church budget guides the senior leader and staff in making decisions for the direction of the church. An annual church budget is an excellent way for senior leaders to detail the specific expression of the vision to the board of elders. By forecasting revenue and expenses in light of

the vision, the senior leader and the board of elders can work together to finalize an annual plan.

Once the board approves the annual plan, the senior leader is empowered to execute the vision within the confines of the approved budget. This process allows for a balance of accountability and empowerment.

Like every plan, annual budgets are sure to change as conditions change. Thus, regular review of performance to the budget gives elder boards visibility to the church's operations. It also provides opportunities for the senior leader and the board of elders to discuss budget amendments as changes are required.

Senior leaders should be equipped with budget amendment authority – often expressed as a percent of the overall budget. This authority empowers the senior leader and their staff to address issues and take advantage of opportunities as they present themselves. The amount of budget amendment authority depends upon numerous factors, such as the leadership team's experience, the amount of cash reserves, and the overall size of the budget. This is a number that will likely change over time.

Dealing With Debt

In addition to operational budgets, the church may also have debt issues to consider. Whether it is a mortgage on a building, an operational line of credit, credit cards, or other debt facilities, the board of elders is charged with considering and managing the debt structures for the church. This also includes capital campaigns designed to raise funds for various projects and approval of financing arrangements.

Treasury Considerations

Along with operational budgets and debt, treasury considerations are also important. Where should cash be invested? What are the parameters for accessing cash reserves?

Financial Reporting

The board of elders is responsible for making the church's financials available to the congregation. This can be accomplished through a formal audit or review process or a simple consolidated set of financials. Generally, publishing and distributing the financial statements is not required. Nor is it necessary to provide detailed, monthly, or quarterly reports. An annual statement that provides a high level of reporting, including revenue, expenses by significant category, debt, and cash positions, is usually sufficient. This statement should be made available to interested members or congregants upon request.

The Values

The values of an organization frame the decision-making and guide the senior leader and their team. Elder boards are responsible for establishing the organization's values and holding the senior leader accountable if the values are violated within the church.

Examples of values include corporate values such as trust, honesty, and the freedom to share concerns without fear of repercussion. These corporate values are often captured and published to the staff and leadership. In addition, the board of elders may establish other values designed to guide the senior leader and their team. For example, “What is the church’s value on debt?” “How much savings should the church keep in reserve?” “What is the church’s position on addressing political issues?”

The list of potential value discussion topics is limitless. Therefore, before an elder board addresses a specific value, they would do well to determine if the issue at hand is a one-off concern or a problem that will likely resurface in the future.

The Policies

Policies are not unlike values in that they guide the senior leader on how to make decisions. Unlike values, policies often involve more complex issues and can have a lengthy explanation. For example, “What is the church’s policy on women in leadership?” “What is the church’s policy on family members working together?” “What is the church’s policy on involvement in the political process?”

Again, like values, the list of possible policies is endless. Thus, policies should be used more to empower than to limit. Well-written policies arm the senior leader and their team with the full backing and authority of the board of elders to execute decisions in a positive direction.

The Meetings

Elder meetings are conducted in accordance with the church bylaws. Typically, bylaws provide that the board's chairman—the senior leader—is responsible for establishing the agenda, setting the meeting times, and guiding the discussion. The bylaws also establish the number of elders who must be present for a quorum to exist—often two-thirds of the total number of active elders.

Facilitating Meetings

The board's chairman calls the meeting to order and progresses in leading the discussion through the established agenda. The chairman is mindful of the ten principles of theocratic government as they facilitate the discussion. It is essential that every elder has the opportunity to be heard on any given topic and that the final debate rests on seeking the counsel of God.

The Agenda

As chairman, the senior leader is responsible for calling an official elders' meeting and setting the agenda for the meeting. This is an important role. With limited exceptions detailed in the bylaws, no one else can call a meeting or set agenda items.

In practice, it is not uncommon for an elder to use the elders' meeting to ask questions or express a concern. This should not be considered an opportunity to put that issue on the agenda for general discussion or a vote. To do so is a violation of singular headship.

If elders have a specific topic they want to discuss, they may submit that issue to the senior leader before the agenda is published and distributed. The senior leader may determine whether to add that issue to the agenda at their sole discretion.

Minutes

The board secretary should keep minutes and present them at the following meeting for approval. Minutes are essential to the board's accountability and provide a record of decisions. Minutes should be as brief as possible, listing only the topic discussed and the final result.

Frequency of Meetings

Most states require at least an annual board meeting; however, from a practical standpoint, more meetings are necessary to run a church properly. The correct frequency is often determined by conditions facing the church:

- Quarterly meetings provide a high-level view for accountability but do not give much opportunity to redirect the direction of the church. This may be appropriate where the vision is consistent and performance to budget is highly predictable.
- Monthly meetings give the elders visibility into the performance to the budget and execution of the vision in regular increments, allowing them to suggest adjustments where necessary.
- However, weekly meetings may be more appropriate in the middle of a building project where conditions are changing rapidly with change orders and capital campaign efforts.

An important consideration in determining frequency is the relational aspect of eldership. When considering frequency, a board should remember the principle of Unity and the relational equity often needed to achieve it. Along this line, many churches hold an annual retreat for their elderships. These retreats are a time of extended fellowship and deep dive into vision, strategy, or policy issues.

Senior Leader Oversight

The practice of singular headship places great authority and responsibility on the senior leader. For theocratic governance to properly function, the senior leader must be overseen by the elder board via an oversight committee comprised of non-staff elders.

Submission to Authority

The principle of Submission to Authority states, “A person only has as much authority as they are under.” In other words, a leader only has as much authority as (1) delegated to them and (2) under which they are submitted to walk. In the Gospel of Luke, the principle of submission to authority is expressed by the Roman Centurion in his interactions with Jesus:

⁶ So Jesus went with them. But just before they arrived at the house, the officer sent some friends to say, “Lord, don’t trouble yourself by coming to my home, for I am not worthy of such an honor. ⁷ I am not even worthy to come and meet you. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed. ⁸ I know this because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, ‘Go,’ and they go, or ‘Come,’ and they come. And if I say to my slaves, ‘Do this,’ they do it.”

⁹ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. Turning to the crowd that was following him, he said, “I tell you, I haven’t seen faith like this in all Israel!”

¹⁰ And when the officer’s friends returned to his house, they found the slave completely healed. (Luke 7:6-10)

AUTHORITY FLOWS FROM TOP TO BOTTOM. IN THEOCRATIC GOVERNANCE, THAT MEANS FROM CHRIST HIMSELF, THROUGH THE BOARD OF ELDERS, THROUGH THE SENIOR LEADER, AND ON INTO THE CHURCH’S LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE.

¹⁸ Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. ¹⁹ Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. ²⁰ Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

Jesus has “all authority,” and he releases it to his church to advance his kingdom. This means the limiting factors for the amount of Christ’s authority getting to the church are the *board of elders* and the *senior leader*! The more authority can be released, the more the church can accomplish.

Stewardship Over Control

This truth emphasizes the importance of church boards practicing theocratic governance to focus on *stewardship over control* of the senior leader. This is not to say that a level of control is not essential; instead, it is the emphasis that matters most. The purpose of the control is to protect the leader – often from themselves – and maximize the organization’s kingdom impact. This is very different from protecting the organization *from* the senior leader!

The question for elder boards should be, “How much more authority can we release into the church through the senior leader?” And as a follow-up, “What is keeping us from releasing more authority, and what can we do about it?”

All too often, church boards find themselves leaning into control over stewardship. Control is more comfortable. The control provides a feeling of safety. Boards that lean into control shift the balance of singular headship and plural leadership too far to the latter – in effect, taking on themselves the role of the senior leader. Conversely, board structures that do not provide oversight and accountability over the senior leader shift the balance too far onto the singular leader. The balance of singular headship and plural leadership offers the most significant opportunity for the kingdom authority to flow.

Senior Leader Oversight Committee

Most visionary senior leaders are not built to be controlled. They do, however, desperately need to be stewarded. In theocratic governance, this is accomplished through the Senior Leader Oversight Committee. This is a select group of non-staff elders chosen by the senior leader and ratified by the elder board.

A leader is only as submitted as they choose to be, and for the oversight committee to function correctly, there must be a great deal of trust between the senior leader and the individuals that make up the committee. For this reason, senior leaders should be allowed to nominate the non-staff elders who will be on the committee and recommend the group's chairman. Once nominated, the elder board ratifies the committee. (See Appendix for an example of a board resolution creating an Oversight Committee.)

The members of the oversight committee must be non-staff elders. Staff elders are not in a position to oversee their boss. Additionally, the committee should be comprised of governing elders as they have a complete view of the senior leader. Trans-local oversight should only be used in specific circumstances (for example, a church plant or crisis-based leadership transition) and for a limited period. **Local accountability is vital to the proper function of theocratic governance.**

The oversight committee stewards the senior leader by performing three essential functions: personal accountability, performance oversight, and protecting the senior leader.

Personal Accountability

The senior leader's spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, and relational health directly impacts the church. The oversight committee is responsible for providing accountability and guidance to the senior leader. The robust nature of this kind of accountability can only occur when the leader and the committee are in a close relationship. Oversight committee members need to be able to observe the senior leader, their marriage, parenting, and friendships. They must observe the senior leader exercising their leadership over the organization.

In addition to personal observation, the committee should ask the senior leader questions such as, “How are you and your spouse doing? What is God saying during your quiet times? Are there any members of the opposite sex trying to get close to you? How would your spouse say you are doing emotionally? How is your schedule?”

As a part of personal accountability, the spouse of the senior leader and the senior leadership staff team should be free to address any issues with the oversight committee's chairman. Also, the job description for the senior leader should include measures for protecting the senior leader's spiritual, mental, emotional, physical, and relational health.

Performance Oversight

The oversight committee has delegated responsibility from the board of elders to address the senior leader's performance. This process begins with developing an Activity-based Job Description for the senior leader. (See the Appendix for an example Senior Pastor Activity-Based Job Description.)

By agreeing on the activities the senior leader is responsible for – and by design *not* responsible for, the committee helps the senior leader prioritize their time. Additionally, by regularly reviewing the job description with the senior leader, the committee has opportunities to discuss any performance issues they observe.

As the group responsible for overseeing the senior leader's performance, the oversight committee is also responsible for setting the senior leaders' compensation package. The committee may reach out to apostolic leaders in the church community for input and guidance; however, they alone bear the responsibility of establishing the senior leader's compensation.

Protecting the Senior Leader

As the group responsible for evaluating the senior leaders' performance, the oversight committee also protects the leader from the community, congregation, staff, and, if necessary, other elders. Any questions about the senior leader's performance are directed to the chairman of the oversight committee, who will, at the committee's sole determination, bring the issue to the attention of the senior leader. Similarly, the committee chairman directs any congregational concerns to the committee. This structure provides the senior leader with a level of protection from complaints, critiques, and “suggestions” from other parties.

Senior Leader Discipline & Removal

The oversight committee is a subcommittee of the board of elders and, as such, is responsible for reporting back to the full eldership. Any elder can ask the oversight committee chairman, “How is the pastor doing?” Also, any elder is free to discuss concerns with the committee chairman.

Should the oversight committee have concerns about the senior leader such that they believe the senior leader should be removed from their position – either temporarily or permanently, they must have the authority to call an elders meeting to address the issue.

The bylaws must provide for a specific vote – for example, two-thirds of a quorum – for the removal or suspension of the senior leader. The reason this critical vote does not follow the principle of unanimity is twofold. First, the senior leader is a voting elder. Second, if the eldership has staff elders, the senior leader could use their position to affect their decision-making ability negatively.

Selecting and Training Elders

In theocratic governance, the current elder board selects new elders. The criterion for selecting elders for a church board significantly differs from choosing a board member for a corporate board.

When considering the principles of Unity and Lifetime Appointment, new elders must be individuals capable of operating relationally in the context of the eldership. Further, considering the principle of Seeking the Counsel of God, the elder must demonstrate the ability to hear God and make faith-filled decisions.

⁶ And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

⁸ It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going. ⁹ And even when he reached the land God promised him, he lived there by faith—for he was like a foreigner, living in tents. And so did Isaac and Jacob, who inherited the same promise. ¹⁰ Abraham was confidently looking forward to a city with eternal foundations, a city designed and built by God. (Hebrews 11:8-10)

Faith-Filled Decision-Making

Elders must be faith-filled in their decision-making. They must be able to hear God and obey – even (and especially) when they don't fully understand *how* something will be accomplished. Hebrews commended Abraham for his faith and obedience to God when he was unsure where God sent him. Genesis says, “⁶ And Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted him as righteous because of his faith.” (Genesis 15:6).

Because theocratic government is primarily concerned with hearing God for the direction of the local church and releasing Christ's authority, elders must have a demonstrated history of faith-filled decisions. God is famous for calling his church to accomplish things that seem, at times, unimaginable. And often, he challenges a church to take a significant step of faith without clearly laying out what is next. Elders must be able to look to heaven's design and direction over human wisdom and manmade plans.

Relationally Centered

Elders must be relationally centered. The practical operation of theocratic governance requires a high degree of relational connection. The principle of Relationships Over Issues is always in

operation. As the epicenter of lasting unity is healthy relationships, elders must demonstrate the capacity to have and maintain relationships. Practically, this means knowing how to invest in others, forgiving quickly, making allowance for one another's faults, and engaging in faith-filled conversations where relationships are valued over accomplishment, personal fulfillment, or spiritual ideals.

Non-Political

Elders must be non-political. The elders must see themselves as loyal, first and foremost, to the church's eldership. Disagreements and opinions should be truthfully and lovingly spoken in meetings following the principle of Honesty and Transparency. Elders should never operate in an adversarial way.

Elders must refrain from operating secretly or politically. For example, an elder should never meet with the other elders individually to sell an idea or push an agenda.

Further, elders must never take on a political identity, such as being the church's champion in the eldership for a group or specific ministry area. Additionally, individual elders must not become a "watchman on the wall" and operate as the self-appointed watchdog over the church, the senior leader, or the finances.

Governmentally Gifted

Elders must be governmentally gifted. Elders get life out of overseeing and governing the church. They can see the big picture and not become fixated on the parts. They understand and respect the church's authority structure and conduct themselves accordingly. To govern in the theocratic governance model, elders must operate within the confines of singular headship and plural leadership.

Elders must be willing to take criticism over decisions without changing their minds or becoming ungracious, and they must publicly support and defend the senior leader, eldership, and church at all times.

Biblically Qualified

Elders must meet the Biblical qualifications of an elder.

This is a trustworthy saying: "If someone aspires to be a church leader, he desires an honorable position."² So, a church leader must be a man whose life is above reproach. He must be faithful to his wife. He must exercise self-control, live wisely, and have a good reputation. He must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must be able to teach.³ He must not be a heavy drinker or be violent. He must be gentle, not quarrelsome, and not love money.⁴ He must manage his own family well, having children who respect and obey him.⁵ For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God's

church? ⁶ A church leader must not be a new believer, because he might become proud, and the devil would cause him to fall. ⁷ Also, people outside the church must speak well of him so that he will not be disgraced and fall into the devil's trap. (1 Timothy 3:1-7)

⁵ I left you on the island of Crete so you could complete our work there and appoint elders in each town as I instructed you. ⁶ An elder must live a blameless life. He must be faithful to his wife, and his children must be believers who don't have a reputation for being wild or rebellious. ⁷ A church leader is a manager of God's household, so he must live a blameless life. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered; he must not be a heavy drinker, violent, or dishonest with money. ⁸ Rather, he must enjoy having guests in his home, and he must love what is good. He must live wisely and be just. He must live a devout and disciplined life. ⁹ He must have a strong belief in the trustworthy message he was taught; then, he will be able to encourage others with wholesome teaching and show those who oppose it where they are wrong. (Titus 1:5-9)

Elders' must be leaders in their homes before leading in the church. This does not mean that their marriage or children must be perfect! It does mean that their home is in Biblical order, and their children are under control. Elders must be able to lead without legalistic discipline or hypocrisy and be committed to others in love with gracious accountability to one another.

Women Elders

Trinity Fellowship Church only ordains men as elders per their interpretation of scripture. Within the Trinity Fellowship Association of Churches (TFAC), some members operate similarly, with a male-only eldership, while others also ordain women. This is a governmental decision each church should make in faith.

The one model that is discouraged is the "spouse as elder" model. In this model, spouses are selected as elders and operate together as a unit under the Biblical concept that "the two are now one." The challenge with this model is that not every spouse meets the qualifications of an elder.

Training Elders

Elder training is on-the-job training. It is helpful to have an elder orientation course at the beginning of their appointment to explain the core elements, function, and practice of theocratic governance. (And it is the author's sincere hope that this work might assist in this area.)

Because of the principles of Seeking the Counsel of God and Unity, elders cannot abstain from voting (except when an elder has a personal conflict of interest). Thus, new elders cannot be seen as "elders in training" or "junior elders."

The Bylaws of the Church

The key elements typically included in a church's bylaws are:

1. **Name and Purpose of the church:** Clearly state the name of the church and its core purpose or mission.
2. **Doctrinal Statement:** Articulates the church's core beliefs and theological stance, which can be essential for maintaining theological consistency and guiding decision-making.
3. **Membership:** Defines how individuals can become members, members' rights and responsibilities, and the membership termination process.
4. **Governance Structure:** Outlines the church's governmental structure, including the roles and responsibilities of the elders. This section includes how elders are appointed and removed.
5. **Senior Leader:** Details how the senior leader is removed and, if necessary, replaced.
6. **Apostolic Board:** Spells the process for establishing Apostolic Elders, their role, and how they are selected and removed.
7. **Meetings:** Specifies the frequency, type, and procedures for church meetings
8. **Financial Management:** Details the processes for financial oversight and public reporting for transparency and accountability on financial matters.
9. **Amendment Procedures:** Establishes the process for amending the bylaws as needed, including who can propose changes and how those changes are approved.
10. **Dissolution Clause:** Outlines the process for dissolving the church, if necessary, including the distribution of assets.

Remember, these elements can vary depending on the church's denomination, size, and specific needs. It's often advisable for churches to consult with legal and ecclesiastical experts when drafting or revising their bylaws.

Appendix

Board Resolution Creating Oversight Committee

By resolution on June 7, 2019, the Board of Elders of House of Hope Church create the following subcommittees, set appointments, and define their responsibilities:

Senior Pastor Oversight Committee

Members: Bob Smith, Chairman
Stan Leaven
Tony Potter

Purpose: The purpose of the Senior Pastor Oversight Committee is to directly oversee the Senior Pastor by:

1. Establishing the Activity-Based Job Description for the Senior Pastor.
2. Setting the Senior Pastor's compensation package and reviewing any of the Senior Pastor's family members' compensation packages.
3. Stewarding the gifts, talents, and abilities of the Senior Pastor by exerting relational accountability over all areas of the Senior Pastor's life, including, but not limited to, spiritual health, marriage, family, physical health, purity, and rest.
4. Report, as needed or requested, to the Board of Elders on the performance or spiritual condition of the Senior Pastor.
5. Address any questions or concerns about the Senior Pastor and his performance or spiritual condition to the Board, Elders, congregation members, or the community.

Senior Pastor Activity-Based Job Description

Title: Senior Pastor

Reports To: Elder Appointed Oversight Committee

FLSA Status: Exempt

SUMMARY

The Senior Pastor establishes and promotes the church's vision through chairing the Board of Elders, leading the staff, and pastoring the congregation. Additionally, the Senior Pastor serves as an apostolic leader advancing the Kingdom of God worldwide.

PRIMARY JOB ACTIVITIES

1. Annually update and present the church's strategic vision to the Board of Elders for approval.
2. Develop Discipleship Content for the church through the following activities:
 - a. Manage the pulpit by developing a healthy “diet” of content for the congregation, personally preaching at least 30 times per year.
 - b. Produce a weekly podcast.
 - c. Produce content and distribute digital discipleship content.
 - d. Produce other content as required, including books, thought pieces, videos, and podcasts.
3. Annually review the performance of each campus and ministry by the vision and target metrics.
4. Annually submit to the Board of Elders for their approval of the fiscal budget.
5. Chair 6 TFM Elder Board meetings, 2 All Campus Elder meetings, and 1 Elder Retreat each year. Attend Administrative Elder's meetings and other ad-hoc committee meetings as needed.
6. Lead the Executive Staff through 1 annual retreat and regular staff meetings.
7. Pastor the staff by leading 8 of 10 staff chapels per year.
8. Lead direct reports through staffing in alignment with budgets, development of activity-based job descriptions, setting developmental goals, regular reviews, and providing, as needed, individual coaching.

9. Pastor the Dream Team speaking at applicable meetings to cast vision, share perspective, and engage leaders.
10. Expand relational connections by speaking out at other churches a maximum of 5 weekends per year, prioritizing related churches.

PERSONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

1. Take one day per week, Sabbath.
2. Take two vision retreats per year (Winter, Fall) with spouse.
3. Take a 3-week Sabbatical – including four weekends – off each summer with spouse.
4. Meet quarterly (at a minimum) with the Oversight Committee for relationship, encouragement, input, and oversight.
5. Get an annual physical. Submit results and action plan to the Oversight Committee.
6. Attend weekend services a minimum of 35 times per year. (Weekends out: four sabbatical, five preaching, three vacation, five business travel)

Example Bylaws

<These bylaws are provided as an example only. Trinity Fellowship Church and TFAC recommend that you consult a local attorney for specific bylaw questions, review, and implementation.>

These Bylaws (“*Bylaws*”) govern the affairs of House of Hope Ministries, a Texas nonprofit religious corporation (the “*Church*” or “*Corporation*”). The Church is organized under Title 2, Chapter 22 of the Texas Business Organizations Code (hereafter the “*Code*”)

1. Statement of Faith

1.1 The Trinity

It is the testimony of both Testaments and the Christian Church that God is One and Triune. The Biblical revelation testifies that there is only one God and that He is eternally existent in Three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

God the Father – God the Father is the Creator and sustainer of all things, who created the universe in love to respond to Himself. He created man in His image for fellowship, and calls man back to Himself through Christ after the rebellion and fall of man. (Genesis 1:26)

The Son – Jesus Christ is eternally God. From the beginning, he was with the Father and the Holy Spirit, and all things were made through Him. For man’s redemption, He left heaven and became incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and subsequently, He is forever one Christ with two natures, God and Man, in one Person. (John 1:1)

The Holy Spirit – The Holy Spirit is God, the Lord and giver of life, who was active in the Old Testament, and given to the Church in fullness at Pentecost. He empowers the saints for service and witness. He imparts the life of Christ to the believer through the new birth experience and works to conform the believer to the image of Christ. The baptism in the Holy Spirit, subsequent to conversion, releases the fullness of the Spirit in the believer's life and is evidenced by tongues, joy, praise, and other inward and outward manifestations. (John 14:16,17)

1.2 The Scripture

We believe that the Bible Scriptures comprised of the Old and New Testaments alone are the only infallible, Holy Spirit-inspired Word of God, and its authority is ultimate, final, and eternal. It cannot be added to, subtracted from, or superseded. The Bible is the source of all doctrine, instruction, correction, and reproof. It contains all that is needed to guide godliness and practical Christian conduct. Only through the revelation and operation of the Holy Spirit does the Word of God become alive and effective in our lives. The Bible is the standard for our relational and experiential knowledge of God. Any personal ministry or prophecy must accord with Scripture, or if not, be considered false and rejected.

Literal word-for-word translations of Hebrew and Greek and the most reliable manuscripts give us the most reliable translations today. Biblical scholarship, therefore, holds translations such as the King James, New King James, New American Standard, and the English Standard Version as

the most reliable for authoritative use for doctrine. While the list above of versions is not an exhaustive list of reliability or value, other versions written with a cultural agenda are not accepted. (2 Timothy 3:16, Isaiah 55:11, Matthew 24:35, Joshua 1:8, Psalm 12:6)

1.3 The Atonement

Christ's vicarious death on the cross paid the penalty for the sins of the whole world and inaugurated the New Covenant in His blood for those who receive Christ as their Lord and Savior. His atoning sacrifice makes healing of the body, soul, and spirit available when appropriated by His saints. (Hebrews 9:12, 1 Peter 3:18, Isaiah 53:5, 1 Peter 2:24, Revelation 5:9)

1.4 Salvation

The Bible declares clearly that salvation is a free gift of God appropriated only through faith, based entirely on the accomplished and finished work of Christ's death and His resurrection. Salvation occurs when a person confesses and accepts Christ as Lord and Savior, resulting in being born again. The new birth is described as being united with Christ in His death and resurrection so that we pass from death to life and our identity changes from the old man to a new creation in Christ. Salvation results include justification, reconciliation, regeneration, righteousness, and sanctification.

The new life in Christ also includes the privileges of adoption and inheritance as sons of God and citizens in His Kingdom. Salvation is an act of free will in response to God's love for mankind. It is predestined only in the sense that God, through His omniscience, foreknew those who would choose Him. (Mark 16:15-16, Acts 2:38, Romans 10:8-10, Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 John 2:2)

1.5 The Christian Life

Through the experience of salvation, our old life, inherited from Adam, is crucified with Christ, and we are born again as new creations into the risen life of Christ, the second man. As new creations, we are born into the Kingdom of God as infants, and we live our lives becoming progressively more mature in our faith as we yield to the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. This maturity is an experiential process of having our minds renewed by the truth revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. As we become progressively more mature in Christ, our behavior will more and more reflect His life in us and His purposes for us. A vital part of this process is living in the community of believers that make up the Church and allowing ourselves to be built up by our relationships with other believers.

The Christian life, while joyful and fulfilling, still includes trials, tests, and warfare against a spiritual enemy who takes advantage of our flesh to lure us into sinful behavior and independence from God. Victory over these trials, tests, and attacks is provided to us through our faith in Christ's finished work on the cross that redeems us from the enemy's power. (Romans 12:12, Ephesians 4:14-16, Galatians 5:16-26, Philippians 2:12-13)

1.6 The Church

The church is described in scripture as the Bride and Body of Christ. The church comprises those whom the Spirit has baptized into His Body through the miracle of salvation and the new birth. The command of Christ for the church is to fulfill His commission, to go unto all the world, proclaim the good news, disciple believers to maturity, and equip the saints for ministry.

The office of Elder governs the church according to scripture. It is essential to the unity and well-being of the church that members function under authority. The church leadership practices scriptural standards and patterns of church discipline and instruction. (Mark 16:15-18; Matthew 28:18-20; 1 Corinthians 12:12-14; Acts 20:28; Titus 1:5-11; Titus 3:10)

1.7 Water Baptism and Communion

The Bible establishes two perpetual commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Church. The first, water baptism, is the outward sign of what God has already done in the individual's life and is a testimony to all that the person belongs now to Jesus. It is an identification with Jesus and is affected by the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Communion is a commemoration of the death of the Lord and is done in remembrance of Him until He comes again. It is a sign of our participation in Him. Both institutions are reserved for believers. (Acts 2:38, Mark 16:16, Matthew 28:19, Colossians 2:12-13, Luke 22:19-20, 1 Corinthians 15:23-26)

1.8 Eschatology

We believe in the bodily, personal, second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the resurrection of the Saints, the Millennium, and the final judgment. The final judgment will ultimately reveal the eternal status of the saints and the unbelievers, determined by their relationship to Jesus Christ. We affirm with the Bible the final state of the New Heavens and New Earth. (John 14:3, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Matthew 25:31-34, Hebrews 9:28)

1.9 Biblical Marriage

We believe the term "marriage" has only one meaning, and that is marriage sanctioned by God, which is the joining together of one man and one woman in a single, exclusive covenant as defined in the Bible ("Biblical Marriage"). We believe that because God our Creator established marriage as a sacred institution between one man and one woman, the idea that marriage is a covenant only between one man and one woman has been the Biblical definition of marriage for all of human history. Biblical Marriage is the only definition of marriage God recognizes or accepts. (Genesis 2:22-24, Matthew 19:4-6, 1 Timothy 3:12, Ephesians 5:22-28)

1.10 Sex & Gender

We believe God wonderfully and immutably creates each person biologically male or female. These two distinct, complementary sexes and their corresponding genders together reflect the image and nature of God. Rejection of one's biological sex or associated gender is a rejection of the image of God within that person. (Genesis 1:26-27, Psalm 139:13-16)

1.11 Statement of Faith Policy

The Statement of Faith Policy of the Church ("***Statement of Faith***") details the beliefs and Biblical foundations upon which the Church operates. Therefore, no Elder, officer, employee, servant, agent, or any person, corporation, organization, or entity under the direction or control of the Church may commit any act or omission or make any decision whatsoever that would be inconsistent with or any person could perceive that to be inconsistent with, full support of this Statement of Faith.

This Statement of Faith specifically prohibits the use of any property (whether tangible, personal, or intangible) owned by or subject to the direction or control of the Church in any

manner that would be or could be perceived by any person to be inconsistent with this Statement of Faith, including but not limited to permitting any Church facilities to be used by any person, organization, corporation, or group that would or might use such facilities to convey, intentionally or by implication, what could be perceived as a favorable impression about any belief that is inconsistent with this Statement of Faith.

We believe this Statement of Faith is based upon God's will for human life as conveyed through the Scriptures, upon which the Church has been founded and anchored. Therefore, this Statement of Faith may only be amended by the unanimous vote of the Board of Elders. To be sure, this Statement of Faith is not subject to change through popular vote, referendum, prevailing opinion of members or the general public, influence of or interpretation by any government authority, agency, or official action, or legal developments on the local, state, or federal level.

2. Membership

2.1 Eligibility

Any person who believes in and has accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, endeavoring to follow Him daily, supporting the Church and its ministries financially, and subscribing substantially to the Statement of Faith shall be eligible for membership. (Romans 5:12-17, Philippians 3:9, Ephesians 4:11-16, 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 1 Peter 5:1-5)

2.2 Requirements for Membership Recognition

- (1) A personal commitment to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in their life;
- (2) Substantial agreement with the Statement of Faith;
- (3) Submission to the decisions, vision, and direction established by the Board of Elders of the Church;
- (4) A commitment to work out problems or disagreements through communication and love;
- (5) Acceptance and support of the decisions of the Board of Elders on issues of disagreement that are not sins or violations of the law;
- (6) Completion of a new member orientation class;
- (7) Financially supportive of the Church and its ministries;
- (8) Spiritually supportive of the vision and ministries of the Church and
- (9) Regular participation in the activities of the Church, including, but not limited to, weekend services, small groups, or events.

2.3 Application

Admission to membership in the Church shall be initiated by the person desiring membership. Membership applications shall be made on the forms provided by the Church.

2.4 Review of Membership

The Church staff shall do periodic reviews of the Member Rolls ("**Member Rolls**") to maintain the current records of Members ("**Members**"). Members who no longer meet the requirements for membership as outlined in these Bylaws or who are terminated according to Section 2.5 will be removed from the Member Rolls.

2.5 Termination of Membership

Members may be terminated in one of the following ways:

- (1) By the member's request,
- (2) By transfer of membership to another Church;
- (3) By determination of the Board of Elders, or their representative, for good and sufficient cause;
- (4) Failure to continue to meet the Requirements for Membership Recognition or
- (5) By death.

3. Governance

3.1 Corporate Officers

(A) President

The President of the Corporation shall be the Senior Pastor ("**President**" or "**Senior Pastor**") of the Church and shall remain President while holding the position of Senior Pastor. In the absence of the President, the Vice-President may represent the Corporation as the acting President.

(B) Vice-President

The Vice-President of the Corporation ("**Vice-President**") shall be an Elder nominated by the President and approved by a two-thirds majority vote of the Board of Elders.

(C) Secretary / Treasurer

The Secretary / Treasurer of the Corporation ("**Corporate Secretary**" or "**Treasurer**") shall be an Elder who has been nominated by the President and approved by a two-thirds majority vote of the Board of Elders. As per the Code, the President and the Secretary may be different.

(D) Term of Office

As per the Code, the term of an Officer shall be no longer than three (3) years, provided, however, that Officer(s) may be elected to consecutive terms.

(E) Removal

The Board of Elders may remove the Vice-President and Corporate Secretary without cause (or upon a triggering event).

(F) Vacancies

In the event of a vacancy of either the Vice-President or Corporate Secretary, an Elder shall be nominated by the President and approved by a two-thirds majority vote of the Board of Elders. Vacancies of the President shall be governed by Section 3.4(D).

3.2 Board of Elders

The Board of Elders (each an “**Elder**,” collectively “**Board of Elders**”) shall oversee the vision and direction of the Church through the Senior Pastor and his management of the staff. The term “Board of Elders” shall mean Board of Directors as required by the Code.

(A) Qualification

The Board of Elders shall be men who meet the scriptural qualifications outlined in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1. They shall have been Members of the Church for a time as determined by the Board of Elders to be sufficient to know and understand the Church vision and to be known within the Church leadership.

(B) Selection

The Board of Elders shall recommend candidates for the Board of Elders. Elders shall be selected by a unanimous vote of the Board of Elders at a regular meeting.

(C) Number and Composition

The number of members comprising the Board of Elders shall be determined at the discretion of the existing Board of Elders, but in no event shall the Board of Elders be less than four (4) members. The Board of Elders shall be made up of both staff and non-staff Elders (“**Staff Elder**” and “**Non-Staff Elder**”) without consideration of the balance of numbers between the two groups.

(D) Term of Office

Elders may serve for as long as they are actively fulfilling their responsibilities and continue to fulfill the qualifications of an Elder.

(E) Elder Leave of Absence

From time to time, it may be necessary for an Elder to lay down his responsibilities. During such periods, the Elder is temporarily removed from the Board of Elders and not counted to establish the quorum.

- (1) Voluntary Leave of Absence: An Elder may request a Voluntary Leave of Absence (“**Voluntary Leave**”) by submitting his request to the Chairman in writing, including the reason and the requested timeframe, which shall not be less than 90 days and not more than 12 months. The Board shall approve the Elders' request before taking effect.

- (2) Involuntary Leave of Absence: The Chairman of the Board may recommend to the Board of Elders (absent the affected Elder) that an Elder be placed on an Involuntary Leave of Absence (“***Involuntary Leave***”). The reasons for such leave are vast and unique to each circumstance but generally involve situations where the Elder needs to focus on his family, personal life, or spiritual life. Such situations, left unattended, could impair the Elder’s ability to fill his oversight duties effectively and could lead to disqualification as an Elder if not properly and promptly addressed. The approval of a two-thirds majority shall initiate an Involuntary Leave vote of the Board of Elders and shall be for a minimum of 90 days and not more than 12 months.
- (3) Staff Sabbatical Leave of Absence: A Staff Elder taking a scheduled sabbatical shall automatically take a Sabbatical Leave of Absence (“***Sabbatical Leave***”) from the Board of Elders for the duration of his sabbatical period not to exceed 12 months.

(F) Nature and Function of Ministry

The ministry of the Office of Elder (“***Office of Elder***”) shall include, but not be limited to, the following: the ability and authority to discharge all ecclesiastical and sacerdotal functions about the Church, including baptizing, officiating in marriage ceremonies, conducting funerals, administration of the Lord’s Supper, counseling, preaching and teaching, and conducting the Church services and ministries. Elders provide the spiritual and governmental covering for the Members.

(G) Governance

The Board of Elders shall be charged with governing and shall have full authority over the corporate functions of the Church. The Board of Elders shall:

- (1) Appoint, remove, and replace Corporate Officers following these bylaws;
- (2) Appoint, remove, and replace Officers of the Board of Elders following these bylaws;
- (3) Review, ratify, and support the vision of the Church;
- (4) Appoint, remove, or replace the Senior Pastor and Chairman of the Board of Elders when necessary due to resignation, death, disqualifying conduct, or failure to fulfill their respective roles as determined by the Board of Elders;
- (5) Appoint or remove Elders to the Board of Elders;
- (6) Appoint or remove Ministering Elders (“***Ministering Elders***”) to serve the congregation; Ministering Elders serve a spiritual function only and are not considered members of the Board of Elders;
- (7) Administrate the funds of the Church through approval of the annual Church budget;
- (8) Appoint independent auditors to audit the books, records, and accounts of the Church on an annual basis;

- (9) Periodically review and update the bylaws of the Church;
- (10) Oversee board membership for Trinity Fellowship integrated auxiliaries.
- (11) Resolve issues relating to the operation of the Church. In the event the Board of Elders is unable to resolve an issue of such a critical nature that it negatively impedes the functional operation or governance of the Church, such issue shall be referred to the Church Apostolic Board (*“Apostolic Board”*) for resolution;
- (12) Appoint and remove all Trinity Fellowship Campus Corporate Officers and
- (13) Appoint and remove members of Trinity Fellowship Campus Boards of Directors.

(H) Ordination & Licensing

The Board of Elders recognizes individuals who are qualified to minister and to discharge all ecclesiastical and sacerdotal functions including, but not limited to, the following: baptizing, officiating in marriage ceremonies, conducting funerals, administration of the Lord’s Supper, counseling, preaching and teaching, and conducting Church services and ministries. The Board of Elders shall Ordain and License individuals who have been recognized and accepted into ministry service in the following areas:

- (1) Men selected to serve as Elders on the Board of Elders of the Church shall be Ordained;
- (2) Men selected to serve as Ministering Elders at campus congregations shall be Ordained;
- (3) Individuals selected to serve as Pastors and Ministers of the Church shall be Licensed or
- (4) Individuals selected to serve the greater body of Christ as trans-local Pastors and Ministers shall be Licensed.

Ordination and Licensing of individuals may be revoked for (a) disqualifying conduct, (b) failure to perform at a leadership level expected, (c) failure to perform duties, and (d) lack of submission to the leadership of the Church. A two-thirds majority vote of the Board of Elders will determine if grounds for removal exist.

(i) Officers of the Board of Elders

Officers of the Board of Elders shall be the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Secretary.

- (1) The Senior Pastor of the Church shall be the Chairman of the Board of Elders. (*“Chairman”*) In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman may represent the Board of Elders as the acting Chairman.
- (2) The Vice-Chairman of the Board of Elders (*“Vice-Chairman”*) shall be an Elder nominated by the Chairman and approved by a two-thirds majority vote.

- (3) The Secretary of the Board of Elders (“*Secretary of Elders*”) shall be an Elder nominated by the Chairman and approved by a two-thirds majority vote.

(j) Duties of the Chairman, Vice-Chairman, and Secretary

The Chairman shall chair Board of Elders meetings, prepare the agenda for Board of Elders meetings, and serve as liaison between the Board of Elders and the congregation. The Vice-Chairman shall perform the duties of the Chairman in his absence. The Secretary shall record the decisions of the Board of Elders in the minutes of all Board of Elders meetings.

(K) Automatic Removal of an Elder from the Board of Elders

An Elder shall be automatically removed from the Board of Elders as a result of one of the following conditions:

- (1) Termination of membership at the Church;
- (2) Termination of employment at the Church;
- (3) Resignation (for personal reasons) in writing; or
- (4) By death.

(L) Process for Removal of an Elder from the Board of Elders

An Elder may be removed from the Board of Elders by a two-thirds majority vote for engaging in Biblically disqualifying conduct or failure to perform at a leadership level expected of an Elder. The affected Elder (“*Awaiting Elder*”) is excluded from voting. The Awaiting Elder may request, and upon consent of the Board of Elders, to appear before the Board of Elders and be heard on the issues serving as the basis for his removal.

(M) Regular Meetings

Regular meetings of the Board of Elders may be held at least once annually with at least one (1) day’s notice at such time and place as will be determined from time to time by the Board of Elders.

(N) Special Meetings

Special meetings of the Board of Elders may be called by: (1) the Chairman or Vice-Chairman, for any purpose and on one day’s notice to each Elder, either personally, by email or by text; or (2) any two (2) Elders, for purposes of discussing the removal of the Senior Pastor or for purposes of submitting an issue to the Apostolic Board, on one (1) days notice to each Elder, either personally, by email, or by text. Except as otherwise expressly provided by statute, the Church’s certificate of incorporation, or these Bylaws, neither the business to be transacted at nor the purpose of any special meeting need be specified in a notice or waiver of notice.

(O) Action Without Meeting

The Elders may take action without a meeting, without prior notice, and a vote only if Elders possessing enough votes to take action sign a written consent(s) that specify the action so taken. The signed consent, or a signed copy, will be placed in the Church’s record book.

(P) Subcommittees

The Board of Elders may create Subcommittees (“**Subcommittees**”) to conduct administrative oversight and perform Elder business as the Board of Elders deems necessary. The Subcommittee will have a designated purpose and a defined scope of authority. The individuals comprising the Subcommittee and the method of appointing the Subcommittee members will be defined when the group is established.

The Subcommittee will be created by a two-thirds majority vote of the Board of Elders at a regularly scheduled or special meeting to establish the Subcommittee. The Subcommittee will serve until dissolved by a two-thirds majority vote of the Board of Elders.

(Q) Polling

The Elders or a Subcommittee may be polled for decisions when it is unfeasible to hold an in-person meeting for conducting business. Polling shall be by telephone or electronic means that allows each person taking part in the meeting to communicate with all other persons, with a good faith attempt made to contact every Elder or member of the Subcommittee. A quorum of two-thirds is required. Only the Chairman or his designee may authorize the polling. Official action will require the unanimous vote of those Elders who respond within 24 hours provided. However, a quorum is met.

(R) Quorum

A two-thirds majority of the Board of Elders shall constitute a quorum for business conduct. Proxy voting by absent Elders is not permitted.

(S) Voting

Official action of the Board of Elders will be taken by unanimous vote of those present unless otherwise specified within these Bylaws.

3.3 Church Apostolic Board

The Chairman shall nominate candidates for the Apostolic Board. The Apostolic Board members shall be appointed by a unanimous vote of the Board of Elders at a regular meeting. The Apostolic Board shall comprise at least three (3) individuals.

Whether an issue shall be referred to the Apostolic Board shall be determined by a majority vote of the Board of Elders present at a meeting.

The resolution of the issue shall be determined by the Church Apostolic Board by a majority vote and shall be binding upon the Board of Elders.

3.4 Office of the Senior Pastor

(A) Singular Headship

The Senior Pastor has the responsibility and full authority from the Board of Elders to execute the vision and values of the Church, and he shall be the singular leader of the organization.

(B) Staff

Through the approval of the budget and budget amendments, the Board of Elders delegates the authority to the Senior Pastor to create, eliminate, and modify staff positions required to perform the work of the Church.

(C) Responsibility and Assignment

The Senior Pastor and his staff shall designate the areas of responsibility for each staff member. They shall assign job descriptions to each staff member and shall set the salary of each person within the salary guidelines established by the Board of Elders, or the Subcommittee established for that purpose.

The Senior Pastor is responsible for directing and leading all activities and ministries of Trinity Fellowship Church per the provisions of these Bylaws. The Senior Pastor and his delegates have the authority to organize the staff, terminate employees, and fill vacant positions within the budget.

(D) Selection of Senior Pastor

In the event the position of Senior Pastor is vacated or removed under Section 3.4(E), the Board of Elders shall form a Nomination Subcommittee ("**Nomination Subcommittee**") comprising of no less than 5 Elders who shall select a candidate. The name of the candidate shall be presented to the Board of Elders. A two-thirds majority vote of the Board of Elders shall appoint the Senior Pastor.

(E) Removal of Senior Pastor.

A two-thirds majority vote of the Board of Elders may remove the Senior Pastor.

3.5 Amendment of Bylaws

A two-thirds majority vote of the Board of Elders may amend these Bylaws.

4. Finance and Property

4.1 Borrowing

Except as provided for in Section 4.2, the Corporation may borrow money and mortgage property only upon approval of the Board of Elders. Two Corporate Officers shall execute all documents in this regard.

4.2 Short-Term Borrowing

Two Corporate Officers may borrow funds for less than one (1) year with the cumulative amount to be at most 5% of the total annual budgeted expenditures for the current year.

4.3 Property

The acquisition and disposition of substantial amounts of real property and assets by the organization of the Church shall require a unanimous vote of the Board of Elders.

4.4 Annual Audit

An annual Church audit will be conducted by an independent auditing firm approved by the Board of Elders or Subcommittee.

4.5 Annual Report

A copy of the annual Audited Report will be available to the Board of Elders and Members.

4.6 Church Year

The fiscal year begins January 1 and ends December 31 of the same year.

5. Autonomy

The Church is autonomous and maintains the right to govern its affairs, independent of denominational control. Recognizing, however, the benefits of cooperation with other churches in the world, this Church may voluntarily affiliate with any churches of like precious faith.

6. Ethics Concern Reporting Policy

The Church requires all its Elders, Officers, employees, and volunteers to observe the high standard of biblical ethics in their duties and responsibilities. Therefore, if an Elder, Officer, employee, volunteer, or Member of the Church reasonably believes that the Church, by and through its Elders, Officers, employees, volunteers, or Members, violates applicable law or regulation or any policy or procedure, or any other biblical ethic, then that individual shall make a formal complaint with either their supervisor or with a member of the Board of Elders of the Church.

- (1) No Retaliation: No reporting individual who, in good faith, reports a violation shall suffer harassment, retaliation, or adverse employment consequences. An employee or representative of the Church who retaliates against a reporting individual who has reported a violation in good faith is subject to discipline up to and including termination of employment and dismissal from Church membership.
- (2) Malicious Allegations: The Board of Elders recognizes that intentionally untruthful, malicious, erroneous, or harassing allegations would damage the mission, integrity, and morals of the Church or the reputation of the accused individual. The safeguards stated in this policy do not apply to individuals who make such complaints. Such allegations may result in disciplinary action, including but not limited to termination of employment and dismissal from Church membership.

7. Miscellaneous Provisions

7.1 Legal Authorities Governing Construction of Bylaws.

These Bylaws will be construed under Texas law. All references in these Bylaws to statutes, regulations, or other sources of legal authority will refer to the authorities cited or their successors, as they may be amended occasionally.

7.2 Legal Construction.

To the greatest extent possible, these Bylaws shall be construed to conform to all legal requirements and all requirements for obtaining and maintaining all tax exemptions that may be available to nonprofit corporations. Suppose any bylaw provision is held invalid, illegal, or unenforceable in any respect. In that case, the invalidity, illegality, or unenforceability will not affect any other provision, and the Bylaws will be construed as if they had not included the invalid, illegal, or unenforceable provision.

7.3 Headings.

The headings used in the Bylaws are for convenience and may not be considered in construing the bylaws.

7.4 Number.

All singular words include the plural, and all plural words include the singular.

7.5 Parties Bound.

The Bylaws will bind and inure to the benefit of the Corporation's directors, officers, and committee members and their respective heirs, executors, administrators, legal representatives, successors, and assigns except as the Bylaws otherwise provide.

7.6 Dissolution.

In the event of the dissolution of the Corporation or the winding up of its affairs, the assets of the Corporation and rights to it shall not be transferred to private ownership but shall be distributed exclusively to charitable, religious, scientific, literary, or educational organizations which would then qualify under the provisions of Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and its regulations as they now exist or as they may hereafter be amended, which are exempt from federal income taxation under Section 501(a) of the Internal Revenue Code or corresponding provisions hereafter in effect.

7.7 Severability

If any provision in these Bylaws is invalid, the remaining provisions will continue in full force and effect without being impaired or invalidated.

