



## ELDER LEADERSHIP @ FIRST



### Frequently Asked Questions – What It Will Look Like

The Church Board is proposing that First Baptist adopt an elder-led form of church leadership.

#### 1. Why are we proposing this change now?

- This change will bring the way we operate into alignment with the Bible.
  - In contrast to the current Church Board that functions as a representational administrative body, members of the Elder Board will function as shepherds and overseers caring for members of the congregation.
  - In contrast to our current single-elder practice (where our Senior Pastor serves as the lone elder), we will have both lay and vocational elders sharing the tasks of shepherding, teaching, and developing ministry strategies.
- This change will create some efficiencies in the way we operate, helping us make decisions more efficiently and with more continuity between the Board, staff and lay volunteer teams.
- With more elders, more meaningful relationships can grow between leaders and members.
- This change is also important for the long-term health of our Senior Pastor. In past decades, our Senior Pastor was supported by significant numbers of lay leaders who served as teachers, advisors and administrators. Over the past 30 years, the numbers and availability of lay leaders has diminished to a point where our Senior Pastor stands as a lone authority or decision-maker in almost every aspect of church life. Under elder leadership, there will be joint decision making on matters of practice and doctrine, in the development of ministry strategies, and in discipline and discipleship matters.

## **2. What will elders do?**

- The primary responsibility of elders is to “shepherd the flock.” This includes teaching, exhorting, refuting false teaching, admonishing those in sin, praying for the sick, caring for members, directing corporate worship, and devoting themselves to prayer and direction from God’s Word and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- The elders will also be responsible for church membership, discipleship programs, developing strategies for church ministries, mentoring members in and for future leadership positions, and mobilizing members in works of ministry at the church, in our community and around the world.
- Other elder responsibilities are to hold the legal responsibility for the affairs of the church, lead business meetings of the church, and oversee the teams, committees and staff who carry out the mission of the church.
- Specific tasks for the Elder Board will be defined in the Bylaws that are to be adopted for elder leadership.

## **3. What does it mean to be “under the authority of elders” (compared our current structure)?**

- Through election and affirmation of elders, the congregation will dispense authority to elders to provide leadership in certain areas—such as theology, preaching, and ministry vision or strategy—for the church as a whole. Today at First, we have given these authorities only to the Senior Pastor. With a plurality of elders, these authorities will be shared by vocational and lay elders.
- Under elder leadership, there will be a necessary yielding to the leadership of the elders by the congregation. God gives responsibility for the work of ministry to the church as a whole, the congregation gives authority to the elders, and the congregation then participates in the work of the church following that authority. This aligns with the teaching of Ephesians 4:1-16 and 1 Peter 5.
- Functionally, beyond their preaching and shepherding responsibilities, you will see elders setting the strategies and vision for the church. They will work with staff, lay members, and volunteers to accomplish that vision through ministry programming. In contrast, today most of the vision and strategy work is directed by the Senior Pastor and much of

the ministry leadership is managed by the staff under the direction of the Senior Pastor.

- While ceding authority to its elected elders, the congregation will remain the final authority of the church. For example, the congregation is the final authority in church dispute and discipline. It also is to hold the elders accountable to biblical teaching.

#### **4. What will deacons do?**

- Deacons will manage member care, visitation and Kinship programs. They will manage the church's financial affairs and the church buildings to support the ministries of the church. They will also manage other programs and services assigned to them by the Elder Board.
- Specific tasks and responsibilities of the Deacons will be designated by the Elder Board by policy.

#### **5. What will members do?**

- Membership responsibilities remain substantially the same under elder leadership: we are to pray for the church, participate in ministries, care for others, share the good news, and give regularly to support the work.
- Members remain the final authority of the church, and will annually elect elders, affirm deacons, and adopt budgets.
- Most importantly, members are to hold the elders accountable to biblical teaching and to support and encourage the elders in their leadership of the church.

#### **6. How will the membership participate in this change?**

- From now through November 2018, we will be holding a series of membership meetings to introduce and discuss the elder leadership proposal. All members are encouraged to participate in these meetings.
- If in December we decide to proceed with a vote for elder leadership, there will be three important membership votes:
  - January 2019      Vote to adopt elder leadership under new bylaws, to be effective September 1, 2019
  - April 2019        Elect a nominating committee
  - August 2019      Elect elders and deacons

## 7. What comes next?

- Additional Town Halls and Congregational Meetings to Introduce the proposal:
  - October 21                      How Ministry Will Work
  - November 15 and 18      Governance and Transition Details
- Gather feedback and refine the proposal:
  - October 7-18                  Small group discussions
  - November 25-Dec. 13      Small group discussions
- Decide, on or about December 15, 2018, if we submit the proposal to a vote in a January 2019 special meeting.