

Pastoral Leadership and Authority

Cedarcreek Community Church

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Every organization needs leadership. Families, businesses, teams, churches, all need some form of leadership. Leadership implies authority in some form. God speaks about leadership and authority in the context of our human organizations.

This paper is designed to describe how leadership functions at Cedarcreek Community Church. Our primary reference for church leadership is the Bible. As we understand God's direction on this subject, we then work to apply it wisely, lovingly and in a way that honors God and His people. This paper will explain the Biblical basis for Cedarcreek's leadership structure, and will explain the practical application of that structure.

OFFICE OF PASTOR:

At Cedarcreek, the role of leading the church is given to the Pastors. We use the word Pastor since it is a common, understandable term. The role or office of Pastor is referred to in the Bible by three different words, all referring to the same office. These are Elder, Shepherd (Pastor) and Overseer (Bishop). The New Testament writers used these words interchangeably when referring to the leaders of the churches. For example, 1 Peter 5:1-2 reads:

“To the ELDERS among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be SHEPHERDS of God's flock that is under your care, serving as OVERSEERS. .”
(*see also Acts 20:17-28; 1 Timothy 3:1-7*)

ROLE OF PASTOR:

The words used to describe the role of a Pastor help us understand how that role functions:

Elder means ‘older’ or ‘senior’. It refers less to physical age than to spiritual maturity. For example, Timothy was a young man, yet he was an Elder based on his spiritual maturity.

Shepherd means ‘to care for’, ‘to protect’, ‘to tend to’. It implies looking out for the well-being of others. In the New Testament it is also a term implying affection and tenderness.

Overseer means ‘superintendent’. It implies management, direction and governance. It generally refers to directing the affairs of the church body. It is an organizational term.

Combining these three, we understand that a Pastor is a man who is spiritually mature, and whose role is to manage the affairs of the church body and to care for the people in the church family.

MOTIVATION OF A PASTOR

A Pastor should be motivated by three basic things:

Service: Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, the example to Pastors. (1 Peter 5:4). Jesus came to serve, not to be served (Matthew 20:28)

Love: Roles and positions, skills and gifts, all are to be used for the benefit of others, motivated by a sincere love for those being served. (1 Corinthians 13)

Honor God: Ultimately, we all serve the Lord. A Pastor needs to be motivated by a sincere desire to honor and worship God. (1 Peter 4:10-11)

AUTHORITY OF A PASTOR:

A Pastor has certain authority within the church. It is limited in scope, but not limited in effect. This means that a Pastor does not have absolute authority in everything that happens in the church or in a congregant's life. However, in those areas that he does have authority, that authority is meant to be honored. (see Hebrews 13:17)

As an Overseer, the Pastor has the authority to lead the church as a body; to make decisions about direction and activities of the church. Here are some Biblical examples of Pastoral oversight of the church:

- Acts 15. The Elders settled a dispute regarding how the church should understand and apply the Law of Moses
- Acts 6. The Elders created a church wide structure to meet a certain ministerial need.
- Titus 1. Titus was directed to appoint leaders in the church, and to restrict other men from leading.

As a Shepherd, the Pastor has little authority. A Pastor does not have the authority to demand that a person believe as the Pastor does. A Pastor does not have the authority to make decisions for a person's life. A Pastor does not have the authority to direct a person's conscience. All of these are between a person and the Lord. Here are some Biblical examples:

- Romans 15:14. Paul asserts that the saints are competent to know and act.
- Romans 14:1-8. Paul leaves matters of conscience to the individual, even if he (Paul) might have different thoughts or convictions.
- 2 Timothy 2:25. Paul directs leaders to instruct, then allow the Holy Spirit to convict.

As an Elder, the Pastor has the authority granted to him by those he is Pastoring. As an older, more mature Christian, a Pastor can be looked to for Godly advice and counsel. But each person chooses how much weight and value to give to a Pastor's thoughts and counsel.

APPOINTMENT OF PASTORS:

Leaders are appointed by other leaders. This is the Biblical example we see in Acts 14:23, Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3. For example, Paul tells Titus:

“The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.” Titus 1:5.

Paul instructs Timothy and Titus to appoint Elders in the various churches. Here are the Biblical criteria for appointing Pastors:

- Acts 20:28. Direction of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is crucial to determine those whom the Spirit has called to this task.
- 1 Timothy 3:1. Confirmation of the Holy Spirit in the man’s heart.
- 1 Timothy 3:2-7. Godly character and experience.
- 2 Timothy 2:12. This role is reserved to men.

At Cedar creek, we raise up Pastors from within the congregation. Any man who is serving and growing and has a desire to shepherd and lead God’s people can make that desire known. The Pastors will also approach men from time to time about the possibility of becoming a Pastor. If the man and the Pastors agree to move forward, the process looks like this:

- The man, the Pastors, the man’s wife, and others who know the man well will fill out an Elder Qualification Test. This ‘test’ is designed to identify strengths and weaknesses as they relate to the Biblical qualifications of a pastor. This test is not absolute, but it can show tendencies and help evaluate a man’s character.
- The man will be presented to the congregation as a potential pastor. The congregation will be asked to give feedback to the Pastors regarding the man.
- The Pastors will take into consideration all of these inputs, and if they are in agreement, the man will be appointed a pastor.

ACCOUNTABILITY OF A PASTOR:

The Chief Shepherd. Ultimately, a Pastor is accountable to God. Hebrews 11:17 says:

“Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account.”

Peter acknowledges that Pastors will answer to Jesus in 1 Peter 5:4:

“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”

This is similar all of us:

“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each on may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” 2 Corinthians 5:10

Pastors, however, will be held to a higher responsibility.

“The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those work is preaching and teaching.” 1 Timothy 5:17

“Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.” James 3:1

Pastoral Team in Plurality. Pastors operate in plurality. This means that each Pastor is responsible to the other Pastors in decision making and in character. Each Pastor has input into the decisions and functions of the other Pastors. The goal is unity. Pastors may disagree and have different perspectives and ideas. When that happens, there is discussion and evaluation. Decisions are made and carried out together. This requires humility, love, trust and submission.

Practically, this means that the Pastors are accountable to each other in decision making.

“Make plans by seeking advice; if you wage war, obtain guidance.”
Proverbs 20:18

“As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I don’t need you!’ And the head cannot say to the feet, ‘I don’t need you!’” 1 Corinthians 12:20-21

It also means that the Pastors can and should hold each other accountable in character.

“Wounds form a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.”

“Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart, and the pleasantness of one’s friend springs from his earnest counsel.”

As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”
Proverbs 27:6, 9, 17

Congregational Input. At Cedar creek, the congregation is asked to reaffirm each Pastor on a yearly basis. This allows a regular opportunity to speak to concerns and questions about how a Pastor is doing his job. This is how the reaffirmation process works:

1. Each Pastor is formally presented to the congregation for reaffirmation once per year.
2. A panel of 3-5 Deacons is appointed by the Deacons to hear questions, concerns and affirmations from the congregation.

3. A period of 1-2 weeks will be allowed for the congregation to give feedback on the Pastor to the panel. All feedback will be confidential.
4. The panel will forward all the feedback to the Pastoral team.
5. The panel will issue a written recommendation to the Pastoral team and the congregation. This recommendation will be to reaffirm the pastor, or, to conduct a more thorough review of the Pastor's qualifications to serve as a Pastor, including the specific issues to be reviewed.
6. Within 30 days of receiving the recommendation, the Pastoral team will issue a written decision on whether the Pastor is reaffirmed, or if more thorough review will be conducted.

DISPUTES WITH A PASTOR:

We all make mistakes. We all misunderstand each other from time to time. We all hurt and are hurt by each other. We all sin against each other. This is true of Pastors and church members. God lays out a procedure for resolving these issues in Matthew 18:15-17. If you have a dispute with or grievance against a Pastor, here is how you could resolve it:

1. Go to the Pastor. Tell him clearly your thoughts and feelings. Listen to his thoughts and feelings. Often this will give clarity and reconciliation.
2. If necessary, enlist the help of one or two others. Bring in other Pastors. Bring in people who know you well, or who know the situation. Often third parties can help resolve the issue.
3. If the dispute is unresolved, ask for a formal review. Here is how that would work:
 - a. The grieved person can choose who will hear the appeal from three options:
 1. The GCC National Office. John Hopley can be reached at john.hopley@gccweb.org.
 2. A panel made up of one Trustee, one Pastor and one Deacon
 3. A panel made up of three local pastors outside of Cedar creek (This option requires the agreement of outside pastors to act in this capacity. Cedar creek can't guarantee this option.)
 - b. A complete understanding of the events and issues will be sought. This will include talking to all parties involved, and may include talking to other parties.
(Prov. 18:17, Deut. 19:15-16, 1 Timothy 5:19)

c. A decision will be made without predisposition to either side, and without deference to the Pastor's position.

(Proverbs 10:18, 1 Timothy 5:20-21)

d. Recommendations and findings will be made public and given to the Pastors for appropriate action.

(1 Timothy 5:20)