



ELDERSHIP GOVERNANCE V11-12-15

INTRODUCTION

This document is an accompanying document to the bylaws of The Bridge Church, The Bridge, in Spring Hill, TN. The structure defined herein was identified and affirmed by a group of men and women assembled in 2014/15 and adopted by the elder body in May of 2015. This structure and document are intended to represent the full understanding and conviction of The Bridge regarding eldership in the church and how the elders at The Bridge will carry out the duties of the office.

The Bridge Church is organized to be an Elder-led, membership-informed church. This means that the elders lead and possess authority to make all decisions and proposals within the church body. At the same time, the congregation is informed and often given a vote of affirmation on important issues. The intent is for the congregation to be supportive of the elders while the elders lead the church with Her best interest in mind at all times.

This document, while detailed, is not an exhaustive effort to provide direction in every situation, but is rather intended to set the structure through which every situation will be handled. The men that the Lord places as elders of The Bridge will be quick to listen to the Lord's direction in all matters while understanding that this structure and document is the firm conviction of the elders and church body and should not be viewed as helpful, but as authoritative.

THE BRIDGE CHURCH'S UNDERSTANDING/ CONVICTION OF BIBLICAL ELDERSHIP

We believe in the plurality of elders, and we also believe in the distribution of work based on gifts and capacity. Through scripture, God has given us specific instruction in regards to the qualifications and general office of an elder, (Titus and Timothy) while maintaining an "inspired silence" to leave room for specific application of the office of elder to local churches. The Bridge Church sees two primary functions of biblical elders:

1. Shepherding
2. Directing

With these two primary functions of elders, The Bridge Church is committed to a structure that will not allow either element to become the primary focus to the neglect of the other. The intent of this structure is to focus individuals as a group on each key function of eldership.

The reason for the structure defined in the following pages is to maximize the impact of varying gifts God has given the elders. A man may be Biblically qualified for eldership and possess a genuine calling, but not be gifted for the large-scale organizational leadership needs of a large, organizationally complex church. We do not want an eldership structure that either prohibits that man from eldership or in which he may hurt the church body by being forced to function in an area of weakness; rather, this structure seeks to empower every qualified and called man into eldership while distributing work based on gifts and capacity. The men selected to serve should not be limited by a number set by man, but by the biblical qualification and ability to serve. For this reason, the number of elders serving at The Bridge will not be set in this document.

Composition of Elder Body



HOW THE BRIDGE CHURCH’S ELDERS WILL BE STRUCTURED

The groups through which pastoral care and pastoral leadership will be addressed are:

1. Shepherding elders for pastoral care
2. Directional Elders for directional leadership
(a subset within the Shepherding Elders)

	SHEPHERDING ELDERS	DIRECTIONAL ELDERS
Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pastoral Care • Doctrinal Oversight • Church Discipline • Accountability for Directional Elders • Approve Annual Budget • Approve denominational/network affiliations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountability for Lead Pastor via annual review • High-level vision • Set governance policy • Prepare and Propose Annual Budget • Approve property acquisitions • Denominational/Network affiliations

	SHEPHERDING ELDERS	DIRECTIONAL ELDERS
Compostition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All elders serve • Staff and Lay combined • Application with onboarding process, approved by Shepherding Elders and membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50:50 / Staff:Lay • Max 8 person • Nominated by lead pastor, approved by Shepherding Elders.
Chaired by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff Elder nominated by Lead Pastor, approved by Shepherding Elders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead Pastor
Term	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No term limit • 6 month sabbatical required every 3 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-year term • Required 1 year off rotation. • Lead and Executive pastor are ex-officio.

SHEPHERDING ELDERS

The Shepherding Elders carry the shepherding responsibility and authority of the elder body. This will be through the following main focuses but will encompass other areas as needed.

PASTORAL CARE

1. Worship gathering shepherding (prayer and spiritual care for people responding)
2. Prayer for and relational connection to the body
3. Prayer and laying on of hands for sick and needy
4. Lead in church discipline and congregational peacemaking
5. Serve as examples of “a godly life in Christ Jesus” to the body

RATIFICATION OF SIGNIFICANT CHURCH UNITY INITIATIVES

1. Approve denominational / network affiliations.
2. Approve any changes to the doctrinal statement
3. Approve church / campus plants

ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

1. Chaired by a staff member appointed by the Lead Pastor and approved by the Shepherding Elder body. The intent is for this staff member to focus primarily on pastoral items and therefore will most often not also serve on the Directional Elder body.

2. Entrust oversight and governance authority of the church to the Directional Elder Team.
3. Meet monthly or as requested by chairperson.
4. Approve appointment to the Directional Elders nominated by the Lead Pastor.
5. Will oversee the process of new elder nominations and onboarding of new elders.

FULL COUNCIL MEETINGS

1. The Elders will meet three times (or as-needed) per year for official Full Council meetings where voting will take place on major initiatives. In these meetings, the lead pastor will chair and Directional Elder body will present at this meeting.
2. At this meeting the Shepherding Elders will:
 - A. Approve bylaw changes*
 - B. Approve changes to the Eldership Governance document*
 - C. Approval of annual budget from Directional Elders
 - D. Approve Directional Elder nominations
 - E. Approve assumption of debt to be presented to the church body

DIRECTIONAL ELDERS

The Directional Elders will be a subset of elders gifted specifically in organizational matters and available to use those gifts in leading the church. This team carries the direction and governance authority of the elder body.

AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

1. Oversee the governance of the church through governing policies
2. Oversee lead pastor including annual review and availability for counsel and advice on any matter.
3. Have high level guidance of culture and accountability through relationship with Lead Pastor.
4. Oversee process of hiring / firing of Lead Pastor
5. Approve annual budget and any budget adjustments >10% of annual budget
6. Approve property acquisitions
7. Approve vision plans and long-term strategy

ORGANIZATION AND STRUCTURE

1. Represent the entire church body in a ratio of 50:50 staff to lay. While there may be times when a 50:50 ratio isn't present, this should be a temporary situation.
2. Be nominated by the Lead Pastor and approved by the Shepherding Elders.
3. Serve a 3 year term with a required 1 year break between terms. This applies to all Directional Elders except for Executive Pastor and Lead Pastor.
4. Chaired by the Lead Pastor or team member who he delegates.

5. Must serve for at least 1 year as Shepherding Elder prior to serving as Directional Elder.
6. Submit and support the group of Directional Elders when vote is final.

MEMBERSHIP

The Bridge is an elder-led, member-informed church. The functionality of this plays itself out as follows: The Membership of The Bridge Church consists of all families who have signed the most recent church membership covenant.

The church members will:

1. Entrusts leadership authority to the affirmed elder body.
2. Vote to affirm or reject proposed individuals for elder appointment.
3. Vote to assume debt over 25% of annual budget.
4. Vote to affirm or reject proposed annual budget.
5. Vote to affirm or reject other significant decisions brought to the membership by the full council of elders.
6. Bring any concerns to the appropriate staff leader or to the chair of the Shepherding Elder body. * all votes are simple majority of 50%+1 unless identified by an* in which case Elders a supermajority of 75%+1 is required. Voting with the church membership will most often take place through silence being a “yes” vote and voicing a concern as a possible “no” vote. When a church member addresses the concern on the initiative, they will have an open ear of the appropriate elder or group at which time they may voice a “no” vote or their concern may be resolved.

ELDER APPOINTMENT PROCESS

The elder appointment process will be overseen and managed by the Shepherding Elder chairperson and the primary group driving this process will be the Shepherding Elder body

PHASE 1: APPLICATION

A man aspiring to eldership applies for Bridge eldership then will complete written and verbal assessments with existing elders. If approved by existing elders overseeing assessments, he moves to Phase 2. Application for eldership The Bridge will be online and open to anyone who aspires to be an elder. Because anyone aspiring to serve as an elder will commonly refrain from applying out of humility, there will likely be a pattern of current elders or other church members

encouraging someone to apply. This will not mean they must or should apply, but that others see in them the biblical qualities of eldership.

PHASE 2: VIEW AND TRAIN (AT LEAST 3 MONTHS)

During this phase, elder candidates are assessing and being assessed for their fit with the team. These men attend Shepherding Elder meetings, but simply “view” (without voice or vote) as candidates. Additionally, these men must complete any necessary Bridge-specific leadership training for vision alignment. If approved, he moves to Phase 3.

PHASE 3: VOICE AND TRAIN (AT LEAST 3 MONTHS)

During this Phase elder candidates attend Shepherding Elder meetings and participate in elder discussions (view and voice), but do not vote on any decisions. Elder candidates continue to move through leadership training for vision alignment. If approved by Shepherding Elders, he is presented to the church body for affirmation. After a congregational vote of affirmation, he becomes a full member.

PHASE 4: FULL MEMBERSHIP

At the end of candidacy these men have final affirmation from the Full Council of elder. At any point along the way the elders overseeing onboarding have a chance to simply communicate, “This isn’t working out for the following reasons...” or at the end of the process present them to the Shepherding Elders to affirm them to full membership. The full membership of The Bridge will have two weeks to bring any potentially disqualifying matters to the nominated elder for resolution, then follow the Matthew 18 model if the concern is not removed. Also, during this two weeks, any church member that has concern that the candidate should not be an elder, that person may approach the chairperson of the Shepherding Elder body.

ELDER REMOVAL PROCESS/GRIEVANCE POLICY

The elder removal process applies to each group of elders: Directional and Shepherding Elders. The process should be followed as indicated following Jesus’s guidance in Matthew 18. Gossip will not be tolerated at any level by any elder and disunity will be fought at every opportunity as it poses the greatest single threat to the health of the elder body and church.

STEPS IN GRIEVANCE POLICY

1. When any church member feels that an elder has committed a disqualifying sin, has wronged them, or is acting in an unwise manner, the person should approach the elder first following the Matthew 18 model.

2. If the person is not able to resolve the issue with the elder, the two should approach the chairperson of the Shepherding Elders in an effort to resolve the disagreement.
3. In accordance with 1 Timothy 5:19, a charge against an elder must be validated by two or more witnesses for the matter to be brought before the Shepherding Elder body at large.
4. If multiple witnesses, the elder, and the chairperson are unable to resolve the situation, they should bring the disagreement or accusation before the entire Shepherding Elder body. The communication to the Shepherding Elder body will be handled by the chairperson and the accusing party should follow the lead of the Shepherding Elder in this process. This should be considered the full congregation in the Matthew 18 model and the entire elder body will vote on the appropriate path forward.
5. Any elder may be removed through this process by a vote of all the Shepherding Elders. This applies to all elders except the Lead Pastor, who can be removed by the following process.
6. The lead pastor may be removed by the above process except the vote should be a super-majority of 75%+1 vote of the Shepherding Elders.
7. If at any point any elder feels that the elder body as a whole is acting in an unwise manner, that person may file an official grievance to the chairperson of the Shepherding Elder body which will be assessed, brought to the directional elder body, then presented to the Shepherding Elder body.

CULTURE AND GENERAL PRACTICE GUIDANCE

1. The greatest threat to the health of the elder body and church body is the threat of disunity. As a result, elders must be masters of peacemaking and unity-preservation amongst themselves. There will be no meetings-after-the-meeting among elders, no “whispering” (Proverbs 26:20), and every effort made to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
2. Staff members are not precluded from eldership, but must still move through the appointment process to move into Bridge eldership.
3. In elder meetings, the chairperson will prepare the agenda prior to the meeting and distribute the agenda to the elder body for review and addition of items. At the commencement of any elder meeting, no new agenda items may be added to that meeting’s agenda but may be added to the next meeting’s agenda.
4. Among the plurality of elders, The Bridge affirms the Biblical role of a “Lead Elder” who serves as a “first among equals” within the elder body. The Lead Pastor will be this leader in the congregation and will serve as the first among equals within the elder body.
5. The terms Elder and Pastor will be used interchangeably as they are the coterminous in scripture. When a new person is hired, they will generally (but not

exclusively) be hired as a director of a ministry area then after a year may enter the eldership process as would any other church member.

6. At any time an elder may request a break of 6-months in which they become an “inactive elder”. This break will be considered a sabbatical from serving as an active elder. This person remains an affirmed elder of the church but is relieved of their duties for this season. A 6-month inactive period is required once every 3 years for every elder unless the Directional Elders submit in writing to the Shepherding Elders that the person should not rotate off. If this is submitted to the Shepherding Elders, a vote will be taken in the Shepherding Elder body to affirm the recommendation of the Directional Elders. An inactive elder will submit in writing to the Directional Elders their interest in rejoining the active elders after the six-month period has ended. They will receive a written response from the Directional Elders before rejoining the active elder body. This reentry will not require the full on-boarding process but will be a simple addition of the elder taking sabbatical to the active elder body.
7. Many decisions are made requiring a majority vote; however, leadership may use discretion not to move forward with a decision if a large less-than-majority percentage of the elder body votes against an initiative. No proposal requiring a majority vote will proceed without at least a majority vote.
8. The Bridge Elders do not necessarily always use Roberts Rules of Order in decision making.
9. Voting takes place electronically between meetings. Stated: lobbying / gossip is unacceptable.
10. A Shepherding Elder is not an office of less importance than the Directional Elders. The approach of having two elder groups as part of the same elder body is to maximize the effectiveness of God’s gifts of leadership, pastoral care, and discernment.
11. Elders will lead from the office of elder in many areas, but elders will not be representatives of the elder body when serving on volunteer teams. Elders will submit to the leader of different ministry areas just as any other church member and serve faithfully and humbly without a pretense of authority.
12. Directional Elders meet bi-monthly (every other month) and as-needed, the Shepherding Elders meet monthly and as-needed. An elder meeting, Full Council, Directional, or Shepherding, may be called only by the chairperson of that group.
13. All elder proposals work their way up from the appropriate staff members to the appropriate elder team(s) to ensure wisdom and cooperation as well as to protect leadership unity.
14. If the office of Lead Pastor is vacated, the Directional Elders will lead the process in filling the position. The Executive Pastor will lead this process through the Directional Elder body. Final approval of a lead pastor will be brought to the church membership for a final vote.*

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15. Elders will have authority to create and delegate responsibility to teams within the church body. This includes finance team, HR team, or other teams deemed helpful and necessary. However, none of these teams are required by this structure.

TO BE ADDED TO BYLAWS

The Full Council of Elders may structure and organize itself however it deems necessary for the sake of simplicity, clarity of communication, and efficiency of organization, according to the needs of the church and the size of the Elders as long as it preserves the plurality of elders and the doctrinal and character requirements for elders articulated in this document.

