

Church Government

The New Testament reflects several workable models of church government, and many denominations continue to adopt structures they believe are scripturally sound and contextually appropriate. These models range from highly centralized leadership to congregational governance, but in every case the governing structure should honour God, fit the church's context, and support healthy leadership.

A team-based leadership model is often the most effective approach in the current ministry environment because it strengthens accountability, shared wisdom, and sustainable decision-making. Acts 15 provides a useful biblical example of leadership operating in a collective rather than purely individual manner.

In practice, effective team ministry depends on clearly defined roles, complementary strengths, and aligned leadership under a recognised lead pastor or senior leader. The objective is not shared activity for its own sake but coordinated leadership in service of the church's mission.

A close reading of the New Testament suggests two core leadership functions within the local church. The first is spiritual oversight and direction, commonly associated with elders; the second is administration and the practical management required for church life, often carried out through deacons or equivalent ministry roles. Both functions are essential, and in smaller settings one person may temporarily carry responsibilities across more than one area.

Titles matter less than clarity of responsibility, spiritual maturity, and faithful execution. What ultimately matters are that the necessary leadership and operational functions are carried out well.

A practical governance model is an eldership and council structure. In this approach, elders retain responsibility for spiritual oversight and overall leadership, while the council broadens operational visibility by including key ministry leaders such as those responsible for children, missions, worship, outreach, administration, and small groups.

Elders

1. Keep to the qualifications mentioned in 1 Timothy 3, Acts 20:28.

'Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.'

2. You do have to take note as to whether a potential elder's dependent children are disciplined and cared for effectively. However, Satan can bring unnecessary condemnation in this area.

3. Do not act in haste in appointing Elders, 1 Timothy 5:22. Have them sit in on the elders' meetings for several months. During this time observe whether they fit or not and how they relate to the existing elders. Note also whether they display humility.
4. Make sure that you have the approval of the church before appointing an Elder. This could be obtained through a special church family meeting or through a pulpit announcement of the intention for the appointment. Listen carefully to any feedback you get.
5. Make certain that the spouse of the Elder is happy about it and is a trustworthy person.
6. Many Elders' meetings find it beneficial to have both husbands and wives at the weekly or some of the meetings. Note comments below.
7. The Senior Pastor is normally looked upon as the leading elder.

Council

The principal advantages of a council structure are set out below.

1. *Communication.* Elders need reliable insight into the congregation's needs, concerns, and spiritual condition. A council creates a structured feedback channel, so leadership decisions remain informed, relevant, and easier to communicate across the church.

When significant change is being considered, early council input can help leaders assess likely reactions, refine the rollout, and reduce unnecessary resistance.

2. *Encouragement.* Ministry leaders require regular support, accountability, and space to surface challenges. A council provides a consistent forum for prayer, reporting, and shared problem-solving across departments.
3. *Unity.* Healthy communication and mutual support build alignment across the leadership team. Regular meetings create space for differences to be addressed constructively, which reduces fragmentation and strengthens the church's overall direction.

'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 133:3

Governance considerations

1. Limiting council membership to active ministry leaders typically improves decision quality and reduces the risk of agenda-driven conflict from individuals without direct operational responsibility.
2. Leadership roles should be reviewed periodically rather than treated as permanent appointments, which helps maintain accountability, effectiveness, and confidence in the leadership structure.
3. Elders should decide who comes onto the Council, although they may need the confidence of church members.
4. Council members should be selected based on character, spiritual maturity, and proven contribution, not only availability.
5. Seldom have a husband and wife on the Council at the same time unless it is necessary. Sometimes, when discussions become heated, the couple may overreact and start a counter-group within the church. If hurtful accusations are made at Council level to one's spouse, they can be hard to erase from the mind.
6. Do not just meet as a Council for prayer and business. Create opportunities for socialising. Be good friends with one another.
7. Although it is advisable for Elders to meet once a week, it is often a good idea for Council members to meet monthly.
8. It can be effective to have meetings chaired by someone other than the senior pastor when this improves objectivity, pace, and meeting discipline; whoever leads should be spiritually mature and demonstrably capable of guiding discussion well.
9. If this is the governing body of the church, those present and any significant decisions agreed on should be noted in the minutes.
10. It is not always possible for every leader of a department to be on the Council, as the numbers may become too large for effective decision-making. If fair representation is recognised, other leadership can graciously accept their exclusion and notify the elders of any significant concerns or joys.
11. Major decisions should not be rushed. Even when people agree in principle, successful implementation often depends on giving sufficient time for alignment and acceptance.