Shared Oversight: Equipping Elders to Shepherd the Flock

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Doctor of Ministry

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Leadership structures vary greatly across various faith traditions, but how much flexibility is biblically warranted? Far from being silent, the Bible is descriptive and prescriptive with regard to a plurality of leadership within a congregation. These elders, also called overseers, are to shepherd the flock (Acts 20:17, 28). The problem is that there is often lack of training to that end. This study constructed a process for training elders and/or potential elders within a congregation to better understand the nature of plurality and parity of those tasked with caring for God’s people. The four training sessions covered the following: (1) The role and prominence of elders throughout the Mosaic and New Covenants and in the early church, (2) the understanding of elders and overseers being the same group who are tasked with shepherding, or pastoring, the church, (3) the parity of elders, regardless of status of employment, and (4) the primacy of teaching in shepherding, including that which is commonly called preaching.

The elders of Providence Church of Texas served as participants in the study, the goal of which was to better equip those tasked with equipping the saints for the work of the ministry. The effectiveness of the training process was evaluated by both a questionnaire given before and after the sessions and via the information gathered by the researcher through discussions in the sessions. The handouts and teacher’s notes from each session are included to aid in adaptability to other ecclesiastical contexts.

Key Words: Church, leadership, elders, teaching, preaching
Acknowledgements

Adding more letters after one’s name can seem trivial and even vain, but the DMin is designed to benefit more than the recipient and the two or three other people who might read the final paper. It is my hope that, after twenty years of fulltime pastoral ministry, this undertaking will benefit Providence Church of Texas for the next twenty years, Lord willing. I have received joy in shepherding that flock and I have been blessed to serve alongside fellow elders Glenn Linsky, Jay Porterfield, and Tommy Sessums. Their support and help were indispensable in this endeavor. My primary consigliore and encouragement, elder Bob Helmick (1928-2020), heard, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” prior to the completion of this degree. He left an indelible impression and I speak for many in thanking God that He brought Bob to emulate the epitome of a elder who loved the flock during our church’s infancy.

I thank my family, my wife, Mary Ellen, and children, Sarah, Rachel, Eric, and Victoria; they have put up with books and papers in most rooms in the house for decades, but even more so the past few years. Their patience and encouragement did not go unnoticed and it would have been easy to point out areas of responsibility being neglected in the pursuit of study.

I thank Liberty University for its fidelity to biblical instruction and prioritizing, not only expository preaching, but also preaching Christ in all the Scriptures. I thank Liberty for offering the Doctor of Ministry, a degree with direct benefit to the body of Christ. Next to the good Lord Himself, success for this degree stems from the oversight of Dr. P. Adam McClendon, my advisor. Such an energizing and helpful guide on this journey is a blessing far beyond this degree and its impact on the author, but will benefit the congregation he is blessed to serve.
Chapter 1: Introduction ...........................................................................................................1
Ministry Context ......................................................................................................................3
(Southern) Baptist Elder Plurality ............................................................................................3
Providence Church Elders .......................................................................................................7
Church Polity: Plurality without Parity? ..................................................................................8
Problem Presented ................................................................................................................11
Purpose Statement ................................................................................................................12
Basic Assumptions ................................................................................................................13
Definitions .............................................................................................................................13
Church ....................................................................................................................................13
Elder .....................................................................................................................................14
Overseer ...............................................................................................................................14
Pastor .....................................................................................................................................14
Teaching ...............................................................................................................................15
Preaching ..............................................................................................................................15
Limitations ............................................................................................................................16
Delimitations ........................................................................................................................16
Thesis Statement ....................................................................................................................17
Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework .......................................................................................18
Literature Review ....................................................................................................................18
Elder Polity .............................................................................................................................19
History ..................................................................................................................................19
Elder Plurality .......................................................................................................................20
Elder Parity ...........................................................................................................................21
Apt to Teach ..........................................................................................................................25
Elder Qualifications ..............................................................................................................25
Elder Responsibilities ..........................................................................................................26
Primacy of Teaching ..........................................................................................................27
Expository Preaching ..........................................................................................................30
Classical Rhetoric ...............................................................................................................32
Expository Preaching Defined .............................................................................................40
Theological Foundations ......................................................................................................43
Shared Leadership ................................................................................................................43
Elders as Leaders ................................................................................................................45
Elders’ Functions ................................................................................................................48
Elders and the Word .............................................................................................................49
Theoretical Foundations ......................................................................................................54
Church Polity .........................................................................................................................54
Elder Polity: Plurality and Parity ............................................................................................57
Chapter 3: Methodology ........................................................................................................58
Intervention Design ..............................................................................................................58
Project Conceptualization ...................................................................................................58
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DMIN</td>
<td>Doctor of Ministry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESV</td>
<td>English Standard Bible</td>
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<td>KJV</td>
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<td>LUSOD</td>
<td>Liberty University School of Divinity</td>
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Chapter 1

Introduction

A key reason for people selecting a home church is the quality of the Sunday morning preaching. Even from a purely pragmatic perspective, it would be hard to overestimate the importance of the preaching in a church. In addition, the spiritual benefits of the congregation being well fed, meaning that which is theologically sound as well as effectively communicated, necessitate preaching be given priority in the church’s ministry. It is not all important, but essential. Churches have often found it worthwhile to financially support the primary preacher, either on a fulltime or even a part-time basis. This frees up someone to focus on the important tasks associated with church ministry, especially the Sunday morning preaching.

One of the presumably unintended consequences, however, of such a scenario is that there is not only an expectation that the financially supported leader should preach the Sunday morning sermon, but there is often an assumption that he is the only one qualified to do so. This expectation may come from the fact that he is employed, but also especially expected if he is a graduate of a seminary. He may be seen as a professional, alone equipped for the task among those in the congregation. This may be the perception, even if there is a plurality of leadership, with a plurality of elders, for example.

When a church has a plurality of leadership with a distinction between paid and unpaid leaders, vocational and non-vocational elders, for example, the roles can be seen to be delineated between those who do the ministry and those who give advice or make decisions respectively. In other words, the role of the vocational elder(s) is distinct from the non-vocational elders, who may be seen as more of a decision-making board than those who also shepherd the flock. Though the church might not state it this way, the church can, practically speaking, have two
different categories of elders, teaching elders as opposed to ruling elders.\textsuperscript{1} Is this a biblical distinction? Or is it a trend that has used a faulty understanding of 1 Timothy 5:17\textsuperscript{2} to justify it?

One of the few qualifications for an elder/overseer outside of character qualities listed in Scripture (e.g., 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9) is that he must be able to teach, without mention of pay or seminary. For the moment, the definition of teaching and one’s aptitude therein will be deferred, but it would seem reasonable to conclude that all elders must be able to teach, or they are not permitted to serve in the role of elder.

Thus, to be qualified to lead, or oversee, the congregation, to shepherd the flock, one must necessarily be qualified to feed the aforementioned sheep through biblically faithful teaching. Although teaching can take more forms than delivering the Sunday morning sermon (e.g., one on one mentoring/discipling, teaching Sunday school, leading small groups, etc.), there is no biblical demarcation that reserves the main stage, so to speak, for the professionals among the congregation. Naturally, one given the opportunity to spend more time in preparation and who gets more practice may be seen as more proficient or even better skilled, but that does not mean the other elders should be denied the opportunity to serve in that capacity or otherwise discouraged thereunto.

On the contrary, by virtue of the office held, those who have been deemed to be qualified as elders should be equipped for the task and given opportunities to grow in the area of preaching. It would be reasonable that the elders who receive their financial sustenance from the congregation would more frequently preach the Sunday morning sermon, but the other elders are

\textsuperscript{1} Although Presbyterian groups will often have hardline distinctions between categories of elders (e.g., teaching versus ruling versus shepherding), for the purposes of this study, it will be argued that not only is a plurality of elders the most biblically faithful approach for Baptist churches, such as the church highlighted in this study, but also that the parity among elders without categorical distinctions is most in accord with Scripture.

\textsuperscript{2} 1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. (ESV)
just as worthy to do so, by virtue of the office held. What may be lacking, however, is not only desire, but the confidence for an elder to deliver a Sunday morning sermon. How can that confidence come? An elder or potential elder must be equipped to equip others for the work of the ministry (cf. Eph 4:11-16).

Ministry Context

Providence Church of Texas in Rowlett, Texas, began as a Southern Baptist church plant in 2006. It began with what was perceived to be a more biblical form of church government, a plurality of elders. These would be men from among the congregation deemed qualified and, therefore, set apart for the task of shepherding God’s flock as its overseers (cf. Acts 20:28). Per the church constitution: “The elders shall exercise oversight over the church ministries and functions and have the general oversight over all of this church’s affairs.”³ The church constitution continues in regard to their collective tasks to note that, “In keeping with biblical principles (e.g., Acts 6:1–6 and 1 Peter 5:1–4), the elders shall devote their time to prayer, to the ministry of the Word (by teaching and encouraging sound doctrine), and to leading, guiding, and shepherding God’s flock.”⁴

(Southern) Baptist Elder Plurality

Within the Southern Baptist Convention, a plurality of elders is the minority report, but it is not a novel approach in Baptist history. In fact, a study of Baptist doctrinal statements validates that ecclesiastical approach to polity. The first “London Baptist Confession of Faith”

⁴ Ibid.
(1644/46) dictates that each local church is to choose qualified “elders and deacons” for the “feeding, governing, serving, and building up” of the church. The second “London Baptist Confession of Faith” (1689) notes that the officers of the church are “bishops or elders, and deacons.” The first Southern Baptist creed, the “Abstract of Principles” (1858), which is still the governing doctrinal statement at both The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY, and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC, lists church officers as “Bishops or Elders, and Deacons.” Even the first edition of the SBC’s “Baptist Faith and Message” (1925) noted that the “Scriptural officers are bishops, or elders, and deacons.”

The first noted departure from such an understanding in Southern Baptist ecclesiology was the 1963 “Baptist Faith and Message,” which made a change to “pastors and deacons” as the officers in the church. One could argue, however, that it is not a substantial change, if one understands the biblically defined relationship between elders and pastors, which will follow. The preponderance of evidence might give the impression that Baptist and even Southern Baptist churches would be at least as likely to have elders as they would to have deacons. But is that the case? On the contrary, the most common form of church governance in Southern Baptist life is the singularity of a pastor with a plurality of deacons. Though perhaps rarely thought of us such, since the term “elder” often sounds too Presbyterian to Baptist ears, the pastor serves as the de facto and only elder. He serves alongside, or at times in contention, with a plurality of deacons.

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5 For example, Baptist pastor Robert Wring argues that, “the practice in Baptist churches is a hybrid church-governance structure that combines Presbyterian and Baptist traditions. ‘This board of elders is a Presbyterian-style church governance, but only on the local-church level.’ … ‘Those favoring ruling elders [in a Baptist church] try to do this along with a congregational church polity style. At best, it is a hybrid Presbyterian style of church governance.’” “Elder Rule Increasing in Baptist Life, and So Is Controversy over Role. Baptist News Global (May 2, 2006), accessed September 20, 2020, https://baptistnews.com/article/elder-rule-increasing-in-baptist-life-and-so-is-controversy-over-role/.
Incidentally, the growing interest in and growing popularity of elders in Southern Baptist churches has been observed, but certainly not without opposition. For example, a 2004 “Issues in Baptist Polity” conference at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, one of the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries, met with much opposition when proponents articulated biblical argumentation for a plurality of elders leading within the context of congregationalism, an essential Baptist identity feature. Although Mark Dever “made a clear distinction between ‘elder-led’ and ‘elder-rule,’ flatly rejecting the Presbyterian model that makes a distinction between teaching elders and ruling elders” and the case was made for the congregation serving as the ultimate authority,6 opponents cast the plurality of elders as endangering Southern Baptist polity as it was a threat to congregationalism, as though elders would act in a more dictatorial fashion. In fact, “the majority of the speakers at the NOBTS polity conference denounced elder rule in Southern Baptist churches.”7 One wonders, however, if much of the opposition comes from a lack of understanding and/or straw man caricatures of what a plurality of elders shepherding the flock would entail, since even Paige Patterson, then the president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, another of the six Southern Baptist Convention seminaries, said, “I do not have a problem with multiplicity of elders within congregationalism.”8

In 2006, the trend to a plurality of elders was noted, but deemed still nearly insignificant statistically. “Clark Finch said the trend toward elder rule is still small within the Southern

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7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.
Baptist Convention,” with “less than 1 percent that have some form of elder.”⁹ It is not just an issue with civil disagreement, but one some see as undermining Baptist identity. One notes that, “the new controversy indicates Baptists are becoming more Presbyterian.”¹⁰ Another opponent, Robert Wring, argues that the trend is moving toward essentially “a small group of men” becoming “the rulers of the church,”¹¹ although that betrays either a misunderstanding or a caricature, since proponents clearly articulate elder accountability to the congregation as they shepherd the flocks God has tasked them to lead. As has been said, “No matter on which side of the issue they fall, however, most observers agree the division is not going away, nor will the emotion and even anger it engenders.”¹²

A 2010 article questioned the compatibility of elders and congregationalism, with elders being a threat to the concept of the priesthood of the believer: “The concept of the priesthood of the believer gave rise to the congregational form of church governance—each member having a say in the decisions the church makes, from calling a pastor to determining the color of the nursery walls.”¹³ That article noted a plurality of elders was “a governing form gaining acceptance among some Baptists—elders, either as a ‘ruling’ elder board that decides administrative and business issues or as a ‘spiritual’ body that leads in doctrine and ministry.”¹⁴

Charles Higgs, of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, however, warns of significant risks.

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¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.


¹⁴ Ibid.
with the elder model, like the potential for the elders to become rulers removed from and out of communication with the congregation, which might lose its voice in the process.\textsuperscript{15}

Providence Church Elders

Bucking the majority report, in line with exegetical conviction, and in keeping with historic precedent, Providence Church of Texas’ 2006 constitution outlined qualifications and general tasks of the elders. It articulated a plurality and parity with regard to the elders. The constitution, however, also made a special category for one of those elders referred to as “the pastor,” one who would be an elder employed by the congregation. The constitution states that, the pastor “shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching.”\textsuperscript{16} In designating the vocational elder as “the pastor,” it could well be inferred that the other elders are not pastors, though they are also called to shepherd/pastor the flock. Practically speaking, the two categories of elder came to be seen as having different roles. Being one of the authors, the researcher can attest that the intention was to note a different proportion of the care of the flock falling upon the one with the greatest opportunity to do so, that is, the employed elder, or pastor, since he had been freed from other pursuits by financial support from the church. The elder parity, instead, became minimized particularly as the employed elder, the pastor, performed the vast majority of the public teaching, especially the Sunday morning preaching.

Since its inception, Providence Church has always had a plurality of leadership, ranging from three to five elders. Over the life of the church, the elders have included men other than the

\textsuperscript{15} Brown, “Can a church be congregational in polity and have elders?”

\textsuperscript{16} “Constitution,” 5.
pastor with seminary degrees and even elders with earned doctorate degrees, but the pastor alone was expected to be the one preaching on Sunday mornings. On the one hand, again, that would make sense, since he has been financially liberated by the congregation to devote his time to serving the congregation, including the aforementioned preaching. The five current elders entail men who are all college graduates, with two of them being seminary graduates, and they range in age from 49 to 92 years of age.

There is much that unites the current elders. For example, there is strong consensus among them doctrinally and philosophically when it comes to an approach to ministry as well as a strong commitment to the inerrancy, infallibility, sufficiency, and authority of Scripture and its proclamation. As such, they are always striving, collectively and individually, to be in conformity with the Scriptures in church practice. Despite the utility of tradition and the emotional attachment to it that may arise, they are committed to the Reformation notion of “Semper Reformanda,” whereby they and the church are “always reforming.” Reforming according to what standard? Sola Scriptura, or Scripture alone, is the ruling authority, so everything else must yield to it.

Plurality without Parity?

The elders share the responsibility to shepherd the flock in general, but practically there has often been deference to the vocational elder as the sole pastor, or shepherd, of the congregation. That may, in part, at least, be a reflection of the fact that none of the elders in the church’s history had served in a church led by a plurality of elders, especially one where plurality and parity were on display. In other words, the church’s elders have not had the benefit of seeing the biblical model practiced, since it is so much the minority report in Southern Baptist
ecclesiology. Their backgrounds have been contrary to the biblically established organizational patterns for a church, so that they work against their conformity to Scripture. The result is that the leadership itself does not always operate in conformity to the plurality and parity of the eldership, which impacts the perception of the congregation as well.

This deference to the pastor in some areas is harder to document and quantify in the realm of shepherding in general, but with regard to Sunday morning preaching, it is more readily apparent. Elders outside of the vocational elder, the one designated as the pastor, have collectively preached on a Sunday morning four, zero, one, and three times, even though they have served as elders since 2006, 2008, 2012, and 2018 respectively. Outside of the current elders, four other men have served as elders, with an approximate ten years of non-vocational service combined. Over that time period, the Sunday morning sermon was preached a total of two times by those men.17

The primary gathering of the church is the 10:30AM Sunday morning worship service. Regardless of what the church constitution might articulate, much of what congregants base their conceptualizations upon regarding elders comes from this weekly event. Presumably, like many evangelical congregations, the lion’s share of the time is devoted to exposition of the Bible in the form of a sermon. Since the inception of Providence Church in 2006, this task has almost exclusively fallen upon the researcher, who has been the lone vocational elder for the all but two of the years the church has existed. The ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper also occur during that morning worship service. The researcher has performed the vast majority of baptisms, but has made a concerted effort over the years to share that privilege. Nonetheless, non-vocational elders have been performed only about twenty percent of the church’s baptisms.

17 After serving two years, one of those non-vocational elders became employed and designated as the “associate pastor.” During the two years he served in that new role, before becoming employed at a church elsewhere, he preached the Sunday morning sermon seven times.
From the beginning, the elders have shared the duties of officiating the Lord’s Supper, which moved from once a month to twice a month beginning in 2014. This simple sharing of that duty has helped communicate to the congregation and guests the identity of the elders and it has become an activity whereby the elders have begun to implement somewhat of a devotional teaching alongside the liturgical practice.

Key teaching elements in the life of the church, in addition to the 10:30AM Sunday morning worship service, are Sunday school and Sunday night activities. The elders of the church have historically been active in teaching during those times, from adults to even teaching the preschool children on occasion and with regularity. Likewise, the current elders are not averse to teaching and are known, consequently, by the congregation as those able to teach. Those teaching roles, however, are not exclusive to the elders. The church has members who are not elders who teach the various Sunday school classes, on Sunday nights, and even during the church’s Good Friday service, which features seven speakers addressing the seven sayings of Christ on the cross. The consequential perception could easily be that the elders teach and are active in doing so, but the Sunday morning sermon is for the pastor, the vocational elder, the paid professional.

The congregation of Providence Church of Texas is among the more erudite, with most adults having formal education and at least a college degree. Often that is the case for both husband and wife. The congregants highly value teaching. The vast majority of the congregation joined not because of the proximity, but as the result of looking for a likeminded congregation theologically, that is, one that is Reformed and Baptist. Although such a hunger for biblical teaching and the depth thereof may be refreshing, it can also be intimidating. On more than one occasion, people have joined the church with a desire to teach, but then became reticent
to do so after seeing the acumen of the congregants during discussions in Sunday school, for example.

Such a ministry context might be even more intimidating to an elder with regard to preaching the Sunday morning sermon, since the expectation of such a preacher goes beyond theologically sound content. Preachers are often evaluated heavily on how dynamic they are in delivering a sermon. Homiletic prowess can have elements of giftedness, but there is also a very basic necessity of practice to enhance what may be seen as success or proficiency. Non-vocational elders, however, do not often get such opportunities to develop their skills. This reality combined with an incomplete understanding of the biblical role of elders, vocational or non-vocational, can severely impede a non-vocational elder from reaching the fullness of his potential in serving the congregation that chose him for that role.

**Problem Presented**

The problem is that Providence Church of Texas lacks an intentional, systematic process whereby it equips elders, and potential elders, to be and feel as competent to effectively communicate God’s Word as vocational elders, particularly those who have been seminary trained. Although God has blessed the congregation with qualified and quality men of maturity to serve in the role of elder, there has never been an educational process to cultivate potential or current elders to further equip them. The lack of intentionality in this regard may be a hindrance to the effectiveness of the elders and thereby the effectiveness of the church’s ministry and God’s glory. The elders of Providence Church of Texas lack education and experience to better understand their role as co-equal elders/overseers who are called to collectively shepherd the flock, which includes the instruction on Sunday mornings in the sermon. As a result, there
persists, among the elders and the congregation, a lack of understanding of the fullness of the Bible’s instruction regarding those who are to lead the church and their roles.

Purpose Statement

The purpose for this DMIN action research thesis is to construct a process for equipping the (potential) elders of Providence Church of Texas to understand their biblical role and their duties, so that they effectively shepherd the flock, which includes the communication of God’s Word. This education process should equip the elders to see themselves as fully functioning elders, called by the church to shepherd the flock whether they are employed by the church or not, whether they have a seminary degree or not. They should, as a result of this process, view themselves as qualified by virtue of their office, so that they would seek out further Sunday morning sermon preaching experience, just as those who have been completed seminary and/or are employed by the church.

This process should have benefit for those interested in pursuing the eldership and for the current elders, especially if they can be involved in the process of teaching and/or otherwise equipping others interested in serving in that capacity. The process would ideally be one repeatable for generations of elders to come as the current elders attempt to live out 2 Timothy 2:2, whereby they take things entrusted to them and entrust them to faithful men who will then be able to teach others as they serve in the role of elder at Providence Church.
Basic Assumptions

For the purposes of this study, the Bible is assumed to be the only inerrant,\textsuperscript{18} infallible, special revelation from God. The spirit of the Protestant Reformation’s “Sola Scriptura,” heralding “Scripture alone” as the church’s ruling authority which trumps all competitors, be they other authorities, tradition, preferences, culture, or experience, is assumed to be the ideal ecclesiastical approach to authority. The elders in place at Providence Church presently and those of the future are assumed to have a desire to improve and better serve in that capacity. It is also assumed that the role of elder is an office, not a gifting, but that teaching is a gift. Although there may be inherent gifting or talent for teaching, it assumed that an elder can and should improve with regard to the task of teaching or preaching through education and experience.

Definitions

In this research document, the relevant terms\textsuperscript{19} will be used according to the following definitions:

“Church” is the translation of the Greek word ἐκκλησία. In the New Testament it is translated as “assembly,” when not referring to Christians (e.g., Luke 22:66; Acts 19:32, 39, 41). In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, ἐκκλησία is used to refer to the gathering of God’s people, Israel, thereby connecting it to New Testament usage.\textsuperscript{20} In reference to Christians, it can refer to the church universal (cf. Matt 16:18), as in Christ’s “bride,” as in

\textsuperscript{18} For elaboration, see the “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” (1978).

\textsuperscript{19} The English terms are those used in the English Standard Version of The Bible, with the exception of pastor, found in the KJV.

Ephesians 5:25. Primarily, however, the term refers to a group living in geographical proximity that assembles for the spiritual reasons (e.g., worship, instruction, fellowship, etc.). For example, Paul addresses the elders of the church at Ephesus in Acts 20:17 and writes letters to the church in Rome, the church in Corinth, the church in Galatia, the church in Ephesus, the church in Philippi, the church in Colossae, and the church in Thessalonica.

“Elder” is the translation of the Greek word πρεσβύτερος. It refers in a general sense to an older person, one “of age,” but its “peculiar problem” is the “twofold meaning of the word,” as in ecclesiastical usage it can also refer to one tasked with oversight of the church. The biblical literature and secondary sources will show that “elder” and “overseer” refer to the same individual(s).

“Overseer” is the translation of the Greek word ἐπίσκοπος. It is used of Christ in 1 Peter 2:25, the shepherd (ποιμήν) and overseer of believers’ souls. Its ecclesiastical usage refers to one who watches over a congregation, in the sense of leading and care. Although there is a human element in selection, Scripture speaks of overseers being assigned their task by God Himself (cf. Acts 20:28).

“Pastor” comes from the Greek word ποιμήν, meaning shepherd. It is typically translated as shepherd in the New Testament when not used in the context of church leadership. However, that usage to refer to one who is a leader in the church is confined to only one place in the New Testament, namely, Ephesians 4:11. It speaks of those shepherds (“pastors,” KJV) being

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21 Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 701.


23 Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 299.

24 Ibid., 684.

25 ποιμήν is uniformly translated as shepherd in the ESV, so that the word “pastor” is nowhere to be found.
given by God to the church to equipped the members for the work of service. Much more common is the verbal form ποιμαίνω, which is often translated as “to shepherd.” The biblical metaphor is of a shepherd who shepherds the sheep, though the contemporary verbiage is of pastor pastoring a congregation or church. The literature will show that there are different emphases in the terms, elders and overseers are the same people, the task of whom is to shepherd or pastor the church.

“Teaching” is the action associated with the Greek word διδαχή. It is required in the qualifications of a leader of the church in 1 Timothy 3:2. It is the communication of information and, within the context of a church, biblical truth intended to build up the hearers. It is a key occupation of one tasked with oversight of a congregation. Like pastors, teachers are seen as gifted by God to a congregation (Eph 4:11).

“Preaching” refers to the Greek verb κηρύσσω and has to do with the proclamation of a message or set of information, or even the “good news” concerning Christ. The practical implications of the differences between the biblical and popular definitions will be examined further when detailing the theological framework, but for now it is helpful to see there is a biblical distinction between teaching and preaching. The contemporary notion of “preaching a sermon,” and expository preaching in general, however, will be shown to be more akin to teaching in light of the biblical terminology. For the practical purposes for this study, expository preaching will be seen as a subset of teaching, as opposed to the “proclamation” described in the New Testament with the use of κηρύσσω.

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26 That which Jesus spoke in Matthew 5-7 is often termed, “The Sermon on the Mount.” Yet, the hearers’ response in Matt 7:28 was that they were amazed at His “teaching” (διδαχή), not “preaching.”
Limitations

The study will be limited by time and a certain degree of subjectivity. There may be self-assessments as well as third-party evaluation, with the desire to gauge the level of preparedness and proficiency both before and after the research and study. The aspect of time will be a limitation such that the study will be complete and yet the full impact upon the congregation cannot be determined without examining future iterations of elders exposed to the process, not to mention the impact on the congregation. Without the limitation of time, years of implementation and assessment of subsequent generations of elders would give a better understanding of the effectiveness of the action research.

It is contended that an elder’s effectiveness and confidence in preaching come through education and experience. For this study, however, the education process will be developed, implemented, and evaluated, with a recognition that a process for gaining experience would also be needed at a later time. The study will be limited to educating elders about the biblical role of elder and the tasks involved with a view toward impacting how they see themselves, their roles, and their capacity for such.

Delimitations

Although the findings may prove beneficial to other congregations, Providence Church in Rowlett, Texas, is in view. The objective is to improve the preaching of the elders, particularly the non-vocational elders. As such, the size of the congregation, the demographics of the city, county, and state, and the demographics of the congregation itself may limit applicability to other contexts and/or congregations. Therefore, the sample size will be limited to the five men in the congregation currently serving as elders and those within the congregation with an interest in pursuing the office of overseer (1 Tim 3:1).
Thesis Statement

If Providence Church of Texas formulates an intentional, systematic educational process of equipping elders and potential elders for their biblical tasks, including effective communication of God’s Word, then the non-vocational elders will be seen as just as competent to preach God’s Word as the elders who are seminary graduates and/or gainfully employed by the congregation, thereby exhibiting both elder plurality and parity.
Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework includes a literature review that expands on the topics and concepts discussed above. It explicates the themes found in the majority of the literature to give a foundation of knowledge with which to interact and upon which to build. The project’s theological context and theoretical foundation build upon those concepts the framework for ministry and practical guidance for how it may be done with biblical fidelity.

Literature Review

Alexander Strauch stresses the necessity of elders metaphorically shepherding sheep, elders who are “incapable of properly feeding and watering themselves” and would expire on their own. 27 Being so indispensable, one wonders more about these elders, who they are and what they are to do. The most detailed information about elders in the Bible has to do with qualifications, answering the question of who may be an elder (e.g., 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). The Bible and current literature, however, also explain whom they are and what they are to do. Part of the qualifications deal with the ability to feed the sheep by teaching, part of which entails what is known as expository preaching. Elder polity will first be examined, followed by the necessity of elders teaching, and lastly expository preaching.

Elder Polity

History

Although not a new structure per se, since it was the norm in Baptist life in the past, the form of church polity discussed in this paper had become rare in congregational circles in the United States, seen more often in Bible churches, but rare in Southern Baptist life especially. Suggestions and speculations vary regarding that trend away from the preponderance of Baptist elder plurality, ranging from inattention to Scripture and less educated ecclesiastical leadership to rapid westward expansion, with the implied difficulty of finding qualified elders, since new churches were being constituted at a rather quick pace as the population moved west. Another suggestion is the influence of two prominent Baptist leaders, Isaac Backus (1724-1806) and John Leland (1754-1841), and their aversion to that which could be perceived as a threat to authority of the congregation, particularly that which is threatening to the authority of the individual within the congregation. In the era of the American revolution, it is suggested that the influence of Thomas Jefferson may have held more sway than the Scriptures, even in establishing a government for the congregation. Paul Burleson has suggested three reasons. First, the westward expansion would often have circuit-riders handling church duties. Second, the rise of Landmarkism and its emphasis on democratic rule as opposed to elder rule was

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28 To illustrate, the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, who served as such from 1845-1851, William Bullein Johnson, praised the plurality of elders/overseers in his work *The Gospel Developed through the Government and Order of the Churches of Jesus Christ*. Johnson wrote, “A plurality in the bishopric is of great importance for mutual counsel and aid, that the government and edification of the flock may be promoted in the best manner.” Mark Dever, ed. *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life—A Collection of Historic Baptist Documents* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Church Reform, 2001), 193.


30 Ibid., 30.
influential. Third, the rise of the Church of Christ movement, which exclusively used the term elders, inclined some Baptists to have an aversion to the term.\textsuperscript{31}

Over the past twenty years or so, that has been changing, as plurality of leadership in a congregational context has been a topic of discussion, primarily due to its implementation and/or exploration thereof. Some might contend that it has arisen alongside the popularity of expository preaching, giving more attention to the Bible, while others would contend it came via the new Calvinism, and others perhaps more pragmatic might explore the idea as a response to problems perceived to be associated with their current polity (e.g., a solo pastor who abused power or otherwise acted in manner perceived to have been preventable with a different polity). Some see it as a welcome trend, while others fear it will change Baptist congregations to Presbyterian ones, presumably due to the association between Presbyterian denominations and their reliance upon the local congregations each having a group of elders as the governing body.

Elder Plurality

With an acknowledgement that church leadership is not a popular topic of study, the goal of this paper is to argue that a plurality of leadership within a congregation is both described and prescribed. Rinne, for example, sees it as “Jesus’s plan for sustainable, effective shepherding in his churches.”\textsuperscript{32} Similarly, White argues that a plurality of elders per church is the “apostolic pattern.”\textsuperscript{33} Along those lines, Waldron acknowledges that in church history there was a shift

\begin{align*}
\text{\textsuperscript{31}} & \text{“An Historical Study of Baptist Elders—1 Peter 5:1-4,” a sermon preached at Trinity Baptist Church in Norman, OK. http://media.hhbc.com/pdfs/elderhistory.pdf} \\
\text{\textsuperscript{32}} & \text{Jeramie Rinne, \textit{Church Elders: How to Shepherd God’s People like Jesus} (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 96.} \\
\text{\textsuperscript{33}} & \text{James R. White in \textit{Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity}, eds. Brand Chad Owen and R. Stanton Norma (Nashville, Broadman & Holman, 2004), 271.}
\end{align*}
away from plurality of leaders governing one congregation toward episcopacy, but argues that, the “starting point of that transition and development was plural-elder congregationalism.”

Time will be taken, however, to substantiate a plurality of leadership as a biblically viable option and perhaps the one most readily demonstrated in the Scriptures. In fact, when there is description of a local church’s polity, the consistent New Testament pattern was that each church (singular) had elders (plural) or was working toward that end. There were new churches without elders, as Waldron notes, as the plurality of elders was not necessary to the “being, but only to the well-being, of the church.”

Waldron, however, observes that the New Testament has no examples of any church having only one elder.

Elder Parity

Definitions are important to understanding the nature of church polity and those involved, namely elders, overseers, and pastors. Are they three different groups of individuals with different roles in a congregation or the same individual(s) in view? Acts 20 is a common place to turn (e.g., White and Waldron) to establish the equivalence, since Acts 20:17 makes it clear

\[\text{\footnotesize[34] Samuel E. Waldron in Who Runs the Church? 4 Views on Church Government, ed. Cowan, Steven B. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 199.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize[35] For elaboration, see the following in context: Elders at the church of Antioch (Acts 11:30), Paul and Barnabas appoint “elders in every church” (Acts 14:23), elders at the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 21:18), elders/bishops at the church of Ephesus (Acts 20:17, 28), the church at Philippi had bishops and deacons (Phil 1:1), Paul tells Timothy, already a leader, the qualifications for elders (1 Tim 3:1-7), elders at the church of Ephesus (1 Tim 5:17), Titus was to appoint elders in every town and since the early church had but one church in every city or town, Paul’s instruction would be to appoint multiple elders in every church (Titus 1:5), the elders of the church are to be summoned for prayer (James 5:14), and Peter addresses the “elders among you” (1 Pet 5:1-2).}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize[36] Waldron, Who Runs the Church?, 247}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize[37] Ibid., 212.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize[38] White, Perspectives, 269-270.}\]

that Paul is addressing the “elders” of the church of Ephesus, whom he also calls “overseers” and exhorts to shepherd, or pastor, the flock in Acts 20:28. Per Getz, “elders” was a term familiar to those of a Jewish background, while “overseers” was a term Paul was free use for that same group, having borrowed it from Roman culture. To put it another way, in a church, elders are overseers, and their collective task is to pastor.

If the terms are interchangeable, does that imply that all elders are equal and possess the same gifts? Advocates of the aforementioned polity argue that since the terms all refer to the same office, it supports the notion of “parity of elders.” Thus, the elders are equal in authority, since there is only one office of elder. That parity implies that every elder has the “same authority to rule” in the church. Some, however, do recognize the validity of a Primus inter pares, or first among elders, as was seen even in the Apostolic era, whereby one particularly gifted may exercise a different role within the plurality.

Similarly, the question is raised about those elders employed by the church as opposed to those not employed by the church. One might distinguish them as vocational versus non-vocational elders, but some go beyond that to create a distinction of category beyond the biblical distinction. Rinne notes that some churches categorize the paid as pastors and the unpaid as elders, with the former being the “ministry pros” who do the work and the others as unpaid “trustees,” who merely make decisions as a governing body, “but the New Testament makes no

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41 Waldron, Who Runs the Church?, 214.

42 White, Perspectives, 290.

43 Waldron, Who Runs the Church?, 214.


45 Waldron, Who Runs the Church?, 197.
such distinction."46 This can make a church more susceptible to evaluating elder candidates in accordance with business models, whereby the church is more like a corporation with the single pastor serving as CEO and “the deacons/elders as the corporate board.”47 Grudem suggests that western churches are particularly prone to the temptation of seeing those who have had success in the business world as being, therefore, suitable for the office elder, one dealing with the business of the church.48

Some may see 1 Timothy 5:17 delineating elders into two categories, ruling and teaching elders, since therein Paul specifies some of the elders as laboring in preaching and teaching, with the following verse indicating a difference in funding from the church.49 Mark Dever notes this is historically one of the key differences between Baptist and Presbyterian approaches to elders, as Baptists do not see a “formal division,” but rather that some of the elders may be more devoted than others to teaching.50 Newton and Schmucker do note, however, that the legitimacy of ruling elders in Baptist circles garnered “much disputation” in the early 1800s, to the point that it was not ruled out, but for practical purposes the plurality of elders was such that the allocation of workload would be influenced to accommodate those elders who had particular gifting in what might be deemed more administrative tasks.51

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46 Rinne, *Church Elders*, 32-33.


49 1 Timothy 5:17–18 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” (ESV)


1 Timothy 5:17 actually identifies double honor for those ruling well and specifies those who labor in teaching and preaching as among that category. The distinction is not between those who rule only and those who teach only, for Waldron notes that, the contrast is between some teaching and a greater degree of teaching.⁵² Waldron summarizes well this aspect of the New Testament teaching regarding the disparity of financial support: “Elders may be supported by the church. Other elders may work at another vocation to support themselves.”⁵³ Rinne notes that, “Lay elders may honor vocational pastors as ‘firsts among equals,’ but the lay elders are still equals.”⁵⁴ Some churches may observe parity among the eldership, but still designate a vocational elder as the teaching elder or pastor. Dever argues that there are “hints of the main preacher” being distinct, but he is still also “fundamentally one of the elders” at that church and not different categorically.⁵⁵

In addition to financial employment separating pastors, or teaching elders, from other elders, some might see the level of education, especially the possession of a seminary degree, as something to categorically differentiate a church’s elders. One of the key differences between those with a seminary education and those without one is proficiency with the biblical languages of Greek and Hebrew. John Piper contends that a lack of expectation among those who shepherd the flock to be familiar with the original languages can lead to “an eldership of professional academicians,”⁵⁶ where only those who have been seminary trained in those areas are seen as being competent to teach God’s Word. Factors such as expectations of availability, especially if

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⁵² Waldron, *Who Runs the Church?*, 216.
⁵³ Ibid., 217.
⁵⁴ Rinne, *Church Elders*, 34.
⁵⁶ John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 84.
the church has freed him up financially to serve, may incline a congregation to see its elders differently, but Rinne notes that from the abundance of “availability, education, or gifting, it doesn’t follow logically (or biblically) that a lay elder is any less a real pastor.”

Apt to Teach

Elder Qualifications

1 Timothy 3:1 is the preface to Paul’s delineation of the qualifications for one to be an overseer, or elder, noting that one aspiring to that office “desires a noble task.” Per Getz, “Paul implied that any Christian man could seek this role. There was no special, divine calling associated with this task.” Of course, desire alone is insufficient, but the structure of the church is such that “any brother who desires and qualifies” may serve in that leadership role.”

Piper notes, in accordance with Eph 5:20-33 and 1 Tim 2:12-13, those whom God tasks to lead the family and God’s family are “spiritual, humble, Christlike men.” Many note there is no requirement in 1 Tim 3 or Titus 1 of a seminary degree or success in the business world, which may be two keys sought by those who bifurcate the eldership into teaching and ruling elders. Instead of secular qualifications, churches should look for men of “character, reputation, ability to handle the Word, and who display the fruit of the Spirit.”

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57 Rinne, Church Elders, 34.
58 Getz, Elders and Leaders, Ch 12, location 1284.
59 Strauch, Biblical Eldership, 111.
60 Piper, Brothers, xii-xiii.
61 Dever, Nine Marks, 231-32.
As seen in Ephesians 4:11-16, Strauch mentions that God lovingly gifts a congregation with those suitable for tasks in building up that congregation toward maturity.\(^{62}\) A plurality of leadership accords with the reality that no one particularly man was gifted with all things necessary to serve the church, but rather, as White notes, elder plurality is a gift from God to ensure that all of the congregation’s needs are properly met.\(^{63}\) Rinne notes that, “Overseers teach, pray, and serve so that their brothers and sisters might know Jesus more intimately, obey him more faithfully, and reflect his character more clearly, both individually and as a church family.”\(^{64}\)

1 Corinthians 9:3-12 indicates that it is appropriate and even necessary for a congregation to financially contribute, so that the congregation can employ their spiritual leaders to serve them, freeing them from having to pursue financial sustenance through outside means. White explains that a smaller congregation may be only able to financially support one of the elders in fulltime ministry, so that he is doing proportionally more than his fellow elders, of whom he is an equal. He may become more widely recognized, but should not be seen as in a different category, but rather merely one who is better enabled to use his gifts in service alongside his equals as they collectively lead the church.\(^{65}\)

Elder Responsibilities

As was seen in Acts 20:28, elders are to shepherd, or pastor, the flock, which encompasses a broad range of tasks. Rinne notes that they are “under-shepherds who serve the


\(^{63}\) White, *Perspectives*, 283.

\(^{64}\) Rinne, *Church Elders*, 40.

\(^{65}\) White, *Perspectives*, 280-81.
Good Shepherd” by leading the congregation. According to Dever, biblical leadership will encompass “the boss commanding, the out-front example, the supplying of what’s needed, and then the serving.”

Waldron notes that the New Testament teaching on “plurality, parity, and diversity of elders” does not negate the diversity of strengths, weaknesses, gifts, experience, or influence each elder has. Similarly, parity of office and official authority does not require an “artificial equality in the distribution of ministry or financial support.” In other words, among the equals there need not be sharing of the tasks in an equal share of each kind.

Primacy of Teaching

Historically, one of the chief means of leaders shepherding the flock has been through biblical teaching. According to William Mounce, in the apostolic era, leadership was primarily a function of “proper teaching.” Rinne agrees, insisting that leaders have been entrusted with God’s Word, since that has always been the means whereby God rules His people.

Fundamental to the task of shepherding is the elders’ “most basic task” of nourishing souls through biblical instruction. Strauch notes that loving leaders and teachers devote themselves to “feeding God’s flock.” In deference to Ephesians 4:11-6, Strauch contends that God’s love for

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66 Rinne, Church Elders, 34-35.
67 Dever, Nine Marks, 240.
68 Waldron, Perspectives, 217.
69 Strauch, Leading, 126.
70 Rinne, Church Elders, 46.
71 Ibid., 45.
72 Strauch, Leading, 125.
His sheep motivates the giving of spiritual gifts, including the gift of teaching to feed His sheep, so that they can grow to maturity.\textsuperscript{73}

It should be noted that the key distinction in the qualifications between elders and deacons in 1 Timothy 3 is the requirement that the elder be able to teach, as is seen in verse two. At the same time, there is no elaboration to include a seminary degree or that the elder be what could be considered a dynamic or captivating speaker. Towner suggests that, due to the distinction regarding the “apparent division of labor” noted in 1 Tim 5:17, perhaps “the ability to teach need not be equally in evidence in each candidate.”\textsuperscript{74} That raises the question of how well one must be able to teach, but it does not alleviate the requirement to be so apt. Based on the emphasis of sound doctrine, as opposed to false teaching, in 1 Timothy, one would assume part of being able to teach would imply teaching that which is doctrinally sound. Teaching it in a manner that is engaging and interesting, which might dominate a contemporary mindset, could be as aspect improved through experience in teaching sound doctrine.

Similarly, Strauch maintains that elders must be able to identify and refute false doctrine as God’s instruments to protect the church as they feed the congregation with truth. This necessitates the bottom line that to shepherd, “elders must be able to teach God’s Word.”\textsuperscript{75} White concurs, insisting on the doctrinally sound requirement for an elder who has the vital role of teaching sound doctrine and “refuting those who contradict it.”\textsuperscript{76} Similarly, Rinne argues that Titus 1:9\textsuperscript{77} requires an elder labor in “fruitful verbal communication of the gospel and biblical

\textsuperscript{73} Strauch, \textit{Leading}, 125.

\textsuperscript{74} Philip H. Towner, \textit{1-2 Timothy & Titus} (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 86.

\textsuperscript{75} Strauch, \textit{Biblical Eldership}, 195.

\textsuperscript{76} White, \textit{Perspectives}, 276.

\textsuperscript{77} Titus 1:9 He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. (ESV)
Since all elders are to shepherd, Strauch insists that it is “without question” that Paul requires “all elders,” regardless of vocation, to be able to rebuke false teachers and promote biblical truth in their exhortation of the Scriptures. White goes so far as to say that it is impossible to shepherd the sheep without teaching, “both overtly and by example.”

Teaching is not merely one of the things an elder must be able to do and must do; it is “central to the elder’s shepherding work,” according to Rinne. For Strauch, this is the key to understanding the biblical role of elder. Instead of elders merely being a decision-making board, they are to be “both guardians and teachers of sound doctrine.” Rinne contends that teaching is that which essentially “sets elders apart” within a congregation. Al Mohler notes that teaching assumes authority. He goes further when drawing a comparison to Jesus, the ultimate shepherd of the sheep, who authoritatively proclaimed God’s truth, in noting that in the same way “potential elders must be known for teaching the Bible well.” Additionally, White notes that this ability to teach illuminates the faithful men Paul tells Timothy to identify, having potential elders in mind in whom to entrust those things that had been taught. Along those lines, Rinne

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78 Rinne, Church Elders, 24.
79 Strauch, Biblical Eldership, 236-37.
80 White, Perspectives, 278.
81 Rinne, Church Elders, 24.
82 Strauch, Biblical Eldership, 79-80.
83 Rinne, Church Elders, 45.
85 Rinne, Church Elders, 25.
86 2 Timothy 2:2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. (ESV)
87 White, Perspectives, 271.
adds that part of teaching that is required of elders is to train up “future pastor-teachers.”

Rather than looking to an outside hire of a seminary graduate, a church can identify those within the congregation with potential and train them with a view toward serving in the role of elder. White concludes this section well by arguing that in giving elders to the church, God has given the church all it needs to accomplish what God intends. Rather than needing to hire outside professionals to teach, God gifts His undershepherds and graciously gifts those undershepherds to the congregation. They collectively provide all “necessary guidance, insight, and proclamation of God’s truth needed in the local body.”

Expository Preaching

Teaching can entail a wide range of activities, from the nonverbal setting of an example, to one on one mentoring, to more formal scenarios, including the Sunday sermon. Should that latter pinnacle of importance be reserved only for paid professionals, those who can really preach well? Is the implication in such question that preaching well means being a dynamic speaker? Far from relegating the non-vocational elder to Sunday school or other seemingly lesser roles, the aforementioned literature indicates that elders are qualified, able, and expected to teach, without any such necessary restrictions based on vocation. To summarize, Rinne explains that

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88 Rinne, *Church Elders*, 55.

89 White, *Perspectives*, 258.

90 There is much debate as to the difference between teaching and preaching. Some would contend teaching is for edifying the church and preaching is for evangelizing the lost. Others would argue that teaching is the transfer of information only, whilst preaching applies truth with the expectation of response. For some, the difference is in location; behind the pulpit is preaching everything else is teaching. For others, preaching is characterized by passion and perhaps even volume or direct imperatives. Some may say they know it when they see/hear it, though it would hard to categorically define. Others might see this as a distinction without difference. For the purposes of this paper, preaching, which will later be further defined and designated as expository preaching, will be assumed to be a subset of teaching. Further delineation goes beyond the scope of this study, but information below will erode the mindset one might have that he is a teacher only and not gifted to be a preacher.
the Bible is clear that an elder in a church is a genuine pastor, or shepherd, “just as much as,
well, the paid pastor.”\(^91\)

With an eye toward that which is essential, Strauch notes that being apt to teach entails
three things: “a knowledge of Scripture, the readiness to teach, and the ability to
communicate.”\(^92\) That raises the question of what is implied by the ability to communicate. He
explains that, “This doesn’t mean that an elder must be an eloquent orator, a dynamic lecturer, or
a highly gifted teacher (which there are very few). But an elder must know the Bible and be able
to instruct others from it.”\(^93\) While some may be naturally gifted orators, communication is a
skill that can be taught and cultivated over time with patient labor and practice. While those
more naturally gifted, proficient, and/or freed up regarding time might preach more often and
more dynamically, any biblically qualified elder should be competent to preach the Word, being
ready in season and out of season (2 Timothy 4:2).

Since, as White notes, there is no warrant for a distinction between the office of pastor
and the office of elder in the New Testament,\(^94\) so there is no justification for restricting the
preaching of a Sunday morning sermon to the paid clergy, the pastoral staff, for example. But
how should one be trained to communicate God’s truth, to preach to the people of God? An
understanding of communication theory will help understand how to employ expository
preaching as the most effective means to feed the sheep, particularly during the Sunday morning
sermon.

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\(^91\) Rinne, *Church Elders*, 34.


\(^93\) Ibid.

\(^94\) White, *Perspectives*, 216.
Classical Rhetoric

Communication theory has been shaped by many over the years, but in oratory, a part of which is homiletics, two names are particularly crucial, and have been since before the church began, namely, Aristotle and Cicero. Some authors hold up the Apostle Paul as being an opponent of rhetoric. MacArthur notes that, Paul did not come as “a clever orator or scholarly genius,” by which he implies that Paul did not see himself as being a persuader in the tradition of rhetoric of his day, although Paul can clearly be seen as utilizing certain rhetorical tools. Though neither Aristotle nor Cicero intended their work for the advancement of Christ’s kingdom via effective communication of the gospel and the truths contained within the Scriptures, their works nonetheless have been useful to that end. There is no reason they should not be used today to accomplish God’s purposes in contemporary preaching.

Among Aristotle’s many contributions, even to the field of rhetoric, his artistic proofs, or means of persuasion are particularly noteworthy with regard to expository preaching. In the texts of three authors in particular, Aristotle’s thought was intentionally portrayed as having contemporary relevance for preachers. For Chapell, “Aristotle’s classical rhetorical distinctions can help preachers consider their basic responsibilities and the attention each deserves.” In other words, the preacher has a responsibility to tend to all three categories of persuasion, for, according to MacArthur, “effective communication from the pulpit must be

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96 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 would corroborate at least the source of Paul’s confidence, in that it was not in his rhetorical skills. “And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.” (ESV)

informed by Aristotle’s rhetorical triad of logos, ethos, and pathos.”98 In fact, there is obligation to prevent listeners from being distracted by poor use of pathos and ethos, which would be, as Chapell describes it, putting a stumbling block to the gospel in a person’s path.99 McDill was somewhat averse to Aristotle and his “three fundamental factors in persuasive public speech: \textit{logos, ethos, and pathos},” but still defined them for the reader: “These are the logical content of the speech, the character of the speaker, and the passion associated with the subject.”100

Compared to a great many texts used to teach homiletics, Chapell makes a relatively unique contribution in the field with his heavy emphasis on Aristotle’s means of persuasion, which, by contrast, are intentionally eschewed by some preaching texts. Some authors ignore them, some mention them, others describe them, but Chapell goes further in advocating for them by name and with explanation: Logos is the verbal content or argument component of a message, whereas pathos deals with the emotive features the preacher conveys and the audience experiences (e.g., passion and fervor), and ethos deals with the credibility of the preacher, seen in his character and concern for the audience’s wellbeing.101 Dissecting 1 Thessalonians 1:5,102 Chapell even supplied his readers with a diagram103 of Aristotle’s triad adapted to Christian preaching.

\begin{itemize}
\item [99] Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Preaching}, 25.
\item [100] Wayne McDill, \textit{Moment of Truth} (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 27. McDill addresses issues dealing with pathos and ethos in this text, but they are completely absent in his required companion text, \textit{The Twelve Essential Skills for Great Preaching}. The latter deals with the content of a sermon, while the former addresses the delivery of a sermon.
\item [102] 1 Thessalonians 1:5 … our gospel came to you not only in word (logos), but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction (pathos). You know what kind of men we proved to be among you (ethos) for your sake. (ESV)
\item [103] Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Preaching}, 14.
\end{itemize}
According to Aristotle, ethos is the most effective means of persuasion.\(^{104}\) A rhetor’s credibility is comprised of competence, character, and good will.\(^{105}\) Those components of ethos serve a preacher well also, which Augustine noted in the ancient period of the church, when he said that a speaker’s lifestyle carries more weight in determining whether he is obediently heard than any semblance of eloquence.\(^{106}\) Similarly, Rinne calls authentic Christ-like character the “sine qua non of pastoral ministry,”\(^{107}\) which would, of course, include preaching. In fact, Chapell sees personal holiness as of upmost importance, since perception of one’s character will impact the sermon’s reception.\(^{108}\) For Chapell, establishing ethos starts even in the sermon’s introduction, which is described as the “preacher’s handshake of good intent.”\(^{109}\) One must be careful, however, as a pretense to humility by means of apologies, even for lack of preparation, as that can prejudice a congregation against a speaker and his message by undermining his ethos, his credibility.\(^{110}\) Chapell notes that the speaker may not pat himself on the back before an audience in an attempt to establish ethos, and his good will toward an audience should ensure he pokes fun at nobody while preaching, except himself.\(^{111}\) It has become cliché to say that, “They won’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” That, however, is an acknowledgement of the role of good will in ethos. Chapell notes that nothing is more important


\(^{105}\) Ibid.


\(^{107}\) Rinne, *Church Elders*, 101.

\(^{108}\) Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 29.

\(^{109}\) Ibid., 231.

\(^{110}\) Ibid., 244.

\(^{111}\) Ibid., 193.
for a preacher’s credibility, and the subsequent reception of the sermon by the audience, than that “audience’s perception of the preacher’s concern for them.”

Another approach to ethos is to see it as related to a preacher’s authority. The preacher is credible and, therefore, authoritative to speak on the subject at hand. Robinson recognizes on the one hand that listeners do not hear a sermon so much as the hear the preacher giving it. “The audience does not hear a sermon, they hear a person—they hear you.” On the other hand, however, he is quick to point out that ultimately a preacher’s authority resides not in himself, but in the biblical text, which then means a failure to faithfully preach the Bible ensures a preacher will abandon his authority. Don Kistler agrees, noting that any ministerial authority is granted or delegated; only “the Author has the authority.” He also notes that a preacher, however, when properly understanding and communicating God’s Word, is God’s instrument, so that it is God whom they are hearing and failure to hear such a minister is, therefore, a “failure to hear God Himself!” That being said, Robinson advocates quotations from others to help establish authority, since those in a position to “know the facts or interpret them” means the audience will more likely accept the information from that source. In that same vein, Rinne admonishes elders to stay under the authority of God’s Word in every facet of ministry, as it reminds all involved that the Bible alone is the absolute authority in the church, whereas elder authority is

112 Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 231.
114 Ibid., 24.
115 Ibid., 20.
116 Don Kistler, *Feed My Sheep*, 226.
117 Ibid., 223.
119 Ibid., 147.
derived from it. In fact, Rinne intensifies this thought by noting that elders only have authority in the church to the extent that they “teach, obey, and enforce Jesus’s Word.”

MacArthur labors the importance of a preacher’s integrity with a view toward ethos and effectiveness in ministry. He explains that any dissonance between a preacher’s life and his message will result in the message being ignored, regardless of who impressively prepared and/or delivered it is, so that defective character erodes any effectiveness of an otherwise authoritative message. Scott Gibson agrees and notes that listeners will only receive an authoritative message if they “know, respect, and like the communicator” as “ethos is still the most powerful means of persuasion.” In a more colloquial expression of that same truth, Rinne notes that, “People don’t have much patience for the ‘Do as I say, not as I do’ type of teacher.” Character alone is not enough, as MacArthur notes, for “competent performance” is also necessary, but persuasiveness depends on the quality of the preacher’s life. Regarding using the authority of another to lend support, MacArthur rejects the idea of quoting someone just because the person happens to be an authority, since the Scripture is authoritative in and of itself and needs no external support.

120 Rinne, Church Elders, 81.
121 Ibid.
122 MacArthur, Rediscovering, 327.
123 Scott Gibson, Preaching to a Postmodern World: 12 Perspectives on Communicating that Connects (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 196-97.
124 Rinne, Church Elders, 102.
125 MacArthur, Rediscovering, 327.
126 Ibid., 345.
127 Ibid., 337.
Even among those who embrace the effectiveness of one’s ethos, there are cautions issued. Success and/or notoriety might led a preacher to seeking to impress, instead of edify. Chapell notes that preaching is not to “showcase erudition,” but rather to edify the listeners.128 Particularly pertinent to the present study is the potential to show off one’s prowess with the original languages, often one of the great benefits of a seminary education, so that there is an undermining of the listeners’ confidence in studying the Bible because they can only read the Bible in English.129

Logos is often taught and emphasized, though not with any manner of identification with Aristotle or the Greek term. Rather, the notion of argument and its foundation of logic is highlighted. As an aside, however, Gibson notes that the postmodern mind can often be suspicious of rhetoric and see it all as not merely a means to persuade, but to manipulate and control, even through logic and reason.130 In contrast, Martin Lloyd-Jones described preaching as logic on fire.131 MacArthur puts an emphasis on logic, since “Preaching is first and foremost a service to the mind as groundwork for service to the heart. The will and emotions are influenced in a lasting way only in proportion to the degree that the mind has learned correct biblical teaching and the level of behavior consonant with that teaching.”132

McDill puts a heavy emphasis on argumentation, noting that although sermons are to persuade, that only happens if the preacher makes a case for his ideas. He admonishes the reader by noting that, “You will have to demonstrate that your point is reasonable and worthy of belief,

128 Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 63.
129 Ibid., 120.
130 Gibson, Postmodern, 186.
131 John Armstrong, Feed My Sheep, 186.
132 MacArthur, Rediscovering, 149.
that what you are saying makes sense. Argument is that part of your support material in which you have reasons for accepting the principles you are present.”\footnote{McDill, \textit{12 Essential Skills}, 127.} Preachers must appeal to the listener’s reason and intellect through argumentation, giving evidence so that “the reasoning hearer will come to the same conclusions” as those shared in the sermon.\footnote{Ibid., 128.} It is through argument, according to McDill, that a persuasive case is made for biblical ideas and to overcome their objections and/or resistance to the case being made.\footnote{Ibid.}

Unsurprisingly, Chapell puts an emphasis on not only logos, but some of the more traditional notions of argument, like validating or proving that the truths a preacher has mined come from the Bible. He admonishes preachers to state the truth, locate the text or texts that confirm that truth, and prove its veracity.\footnote{Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Preaching}, 117.} Not everything must be explained, but Chapell notes any explanation necessary to make points clear and to prove them must not be spared.\footnote{Ibid., 115.} He advocates not only the use of an outline, but also highlights the organization that an outline reveals not only to establish ethos, but also to promote the argument of a message.\footnote{Ibid.} Being practical and yet technical, he speaks of argumentation and the difference between different approaches: “I find that inductive approaches facilitate applicational response while deductive approaches facilitate argumentation.”\footnote{Ibid., 131.}

The use of pathos, to persuade via the emotions, is the most susceptible to being labeled as manipulation. This powerful weapon can be harnessed for good, however, as Chapell

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item McDill, \textit{12 Essential Skills}, 127.
\item Ibid., 128.
\item Ibid.
\item Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Preaching}, 117.
\item Ibid., 115.
\item Ibid., 131.
\item Ibid., 155.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
explains, particularly with touching illustrations that can spark biblical responses.\textsuperscript{140} Human interest stories captivate a listener’s thoughts and make for a great way to introduce sermons,\textsuperscript{141} he notes. The conclusion is where thought and emotion “should arrive at their greatest height,” indicating that the sermon has been moving to action.\textsuperscript{142} Using stories alone that attempt to only manipulate the emotions, Chapell warns, “ranks among the worst abuses of preaching.”\textsuperscript{143}

Jay Adams also advocates the use of stories to “pack an emotional wallop” in concretizing and personalizing truth and showing how it integrates in their lives.\textsuperscript{144} Stories appeal to all demographics and offer a strong appeal to the senses, further engaging the audience.\textsuperscript{145} Passion cannot be faked, however, as Adams warns that to move others, the preacher must first himself have been moved.\textsuperscript{146} MacArthur would agree, insisting that one must feel deeply about the truth being preached.\textsuperscript{147} MacArthur has many warnings about pathos, especially if used to overcome other inadequacies of a sermon. Zeal cannot make up for a lack of substance, he notes.\textsuperscript{148} Stories can certainly have an emotional impact, but lack gravitas when compared to Scripture.\textsuperscript{149} He is quick to point out that he does want to stir emotions, because

\textsuperscript{140} Chapell, \textit{Christ-Centered Preaching}, 175.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., 236.
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid., 246.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., 248.
\textsuperscript{144} Adams, \textit{Preaching}, 67.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{147} MacArthur, \textit{Rediscovering}, 323.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 321.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., 342.
“truth that warms the heart can move the will.” He warns against and opposes any attempt to stimulate emotions separated from truth. Truth divorced from emotion and emotion apart from truth should be equally avoided. MacArthur explains the ultimate concern regarding potential abuse of pathos:

The Word of God is the only legitimate means of persuasion. Legitimate persuasion is cognitive—stirring the mind with reasonable truth. Convicting with tear-jerking stories, histrionics, and emotional outburst takes an unfair advantage of people and wrongly muddles their thinking. That does not mean we cannot use all the communication skills available to us, but we should avoid playing on people’s emotions, even by repeated singing or playing of hymns. These are artificial and should be avoided because they bypass the reason.

Expository Preaching Defined

Preaching is not merely reading aloud the Bible, proclaiming what it says. As Ramesh Richard notes, “the Bible is what God has made. Sermons are what we make with what God has made.” Jay Adams sees as inadequate Phillips Brooks’ popular definition of preaching, that it is “truth through personality.” He identifies five key components of preaching: Content, in the form of a biblical message, a preacher, an occasion (including time and place), listeners, and the Holy Spirit. The preacher’s task is to publicly read the biblical text, teach what it means, and

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150 MacArthur, Rediscovering, 343.
151 Ibid., 344.
152 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
156 Ibid., 7.
then “exhort the congregation to follow the teaching.””

Similarly, Strauch sees one’s role in exhortation as to move the audience to “receive and to apply the truth that has been taught.”

Per Dever, presenting only a running commentary on a passage would be incomplete. Bryan Chapell sees biblical preaching moving “from doctrinal exposition to life instruction.”

For John Piper, preaching should inspire though “expository exultation.” John MacArthur notes that expository preaching requires the expositor to explain the biblical text, particularly that which is difficult to understand, and then make fitting application. For John Stott, expository preaching refers more to the content of the sermon being biblical truth than to its appearance, like a verse by verse exegetical commentary.

MacArthur lists five minimal elements necessary to make preaching expository: The source of the message is Scripture and its message must come “through careful exegesis,” which faithfully interprets the passage in its context. Fourth, the message must explain “the original God-intended meaning” and then, fifth, apply that truth for today. Chapell echoes the common understanding of “explaining and applying” the text by noting that expository preaching is to “present the Word; explain what it says; and exhort based on what it means.”

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157 Adams, Preaching with Purpose, 18.

158 Strauch, Biblical Eldership, 237.

159 Dever, Nine Marks, 40.

160 Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 45.

161 John Piper in Don Kistler, ed., Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publishers, 2002),

162 MacArthur, Rediscovering, 11.


165 Chapell, Christ-Centered Preaching, 82.
expository preaching deals with content and arrangement: “Expository preaching is empowered preaching that rightfully submits the shape and emphasis of the sermon to the shape and emphasis of a biblical text.”

Homiletics professors have offered various definitions of expository preaching. For Mark Dever, it is simply “preaching which takes for the point of a sermon the point of a particular passage of Scripture.” According to Ramesh Richard, “Expository preaching is the contemporization of the central proposition of a biblical text that is derived from proper methods of interpretation and declared through effective means of communication to inform minds, instruct hearts, and influence behavior toward godliness.” An oft quoted definition in others’ texts is that of Haddon Robinson: “Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through the preacher, applies to the hearers.” Perhaps the most elaborate definition comes from Joel Breidenbaugh:

Expository preaching is the Spirit-empowered communication of at least one paragraph (or its literary equivalent) of the biblical text with special concern for interpreting the text in light of the historical, contextual, grammatical, syntactical, and doctrinal significance of the text, deriving from that text the shape and the substance of the message so that the message is experienced by and applied to the preacher and then to the hearers.

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In contrast to such exactitude and precision, there are those who recognize the ambiguity of the situation such that expository preaching is a phenomenon, a process, and a philosophy. Robinson notes that at its core it is “more a philosophy than a method.”¹⁷¹ MacArthur notes that, “Exposition is not so much defined by the form of the message as it is by the source and process through which the message was formed.”¹⁷² Lastly, Robinson adds the element of the mysterious and supernatural: “Preaching is a living interaction involving God, the preacher, and the congregation, and no definition can pretend to capture that dynamic.”¹⁷³

**Theological Foundations**

**Shared Leadership**

Shared leadership seems relatively rare in secular society. Even in governments, for example, where there is a body that governs an area, there is typically one executive, like a prime minister in a parliament or a mayor on a city council, who is a notch above the others. Singularity may be seen as more efficient, more effective, and more clear. In the business world, while there may be a board of directors, there is typically a chief executive officer who really runs things. Each small business typically has an owner, often one who started and built up the business. There is no divine playbook for business, so pragmatism with a view to the bottom line is understandable. “If it works, it’s righteous,” it has been said.

For the church, however, there is a divine playbook. Although it has become more and more common to see business principles creeping in to church life, which is not necessarily a bad


thing, where the Scripture speaks regarding the church and its operations, it should be heard and
heeded. It may be silent on websites and marketing and budgeting, but it speaks often and
directly to church structure, including leadership.

The pattern of shared leadership is somewhat revealed early in the life of God’s people. In Exodus 18, we learn of the benefits of shared leadership, spreading the authority and responsibility among a plurality. In leading God’s covenant people, Moses was clearly the God-appointed leader. The work, however, was too much for one man, even the great prophet Moses. His father-in-law, Jethro, observed Moses at work, spending his entire day, “from morning till evening, educating God’s people regarding God’s statues and laws and rendering decisions when necessary” (Ex 18:16).

Jethro rebuked Moses for his approach to serving the people in this way, telling him that what he was doing was “not good” (Ex 18:17). Moses would soon wear out, as the burden was too heavy to bear alone (Ex 18:18). Jethro’s advice was to share responsibility and authority, delegating to those qualified. He told Moses to “look for able men from all the people, men who fear God, who are truth worthy and hate a bribe, and place such men over the people as chiefs of thousands, hundreds, of fifties, and of tens” (Ex 18:21). Moses would still handle the weightier matters, but they would “bear the burden” with him (Ex 18:22). Moses was still the leader, having a particularly special relationship with God (cf. Num 12:6-8), but the benefits of plurality sharing responsibility and authority would benefit Moses and the people.

Outside of Moses, his successor Joshua, and the judges that God would at times raise up to deal with a crisis, there is little known about how the leadership of the nation or the individual tribes was organized. The monarchy would have a God-ordained executive leader with total authority under God’s delegation, but after its split and downfall, again questions arise about
leadership structure in the exile, with evidence of priests exercising authority and teaching (Mal 2:7) and prophets periodically addressing the people on God’s behalf.

Leadership for Israel under Roman rule in the New Testament consisted mainly of religious authority, since the ruling authorities limited their implementation of areas of regulation. This is seen in the necessity to get the Romans to crucify Jesus, as the Israelites had not the authority to do it themselves. The Aaronic priesthood had a certain plurality evident in the synagogues. Although the priesthood prioritized operations of the temple, much of the religious life of God’s people was via assembling in local synagogues. Jesus taught in the synagogues (e.g., Matt 4:23; 9:35; 12:9; 13:54). Decisions were made in the synagogues, like trials, and it was the place where people would customarily gather on the Sabbath, including Christ (Luke 4:16).

Elders as Leaders

One of the terms used in both testaments is that of elder. One the one hand, it simply refers to one advanced in age. In the Old Testament, elders, often referred to as the “elders of Israel,” were at times summoned for insight or accountability. The first reference is in Exodus 3:16, where Moses is told to “gather the elders of Israel” to proclaim to them the good news that God has seen the plight of Israel. The elders of Israel are to accompany Moses to communicate to Pharaoh the message God has for him. (Ex 3:18). In Exodus 24, seventy of the elders of Israel accompany Moses, Aaron, and two of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, up the mountain to meet with the Lord. In Leviticus 4:15, the “elders of the congregation” participate in the sin offering by the laying of hands.
This prominence is also attached to accountability, presumably due to their authority. For example, Ezekiel 20:3 records the following: “Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD, Is it to inquire of me that you come? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you.” It is to the elders that Joel issues his initial words of warning (Joel 1:2). Psalm 107:32 speaks of the “assembly of the elders” in the context of congregational life. In 1 Kings 8:1 Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and the heads of the tribes, indicating the significance of the elders, as they were involved in the moving of the ark of the covenant. After writing the law, in Deuteronomy 31:9, Moses gave it to “the priests, the sons of Levi” and “to all the elders of Israel.” The authority of the elders collectively is seen in Deuteronomy 27:1, which reads, “Now Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, ‘Keep the whole commandment that I command you today.’” 

In the gospels, the elders are portrayed as those respected with some measure of influence in the community, as Jesus is rebuked in Matt 15:2, because his disciples broke “the tradition of the elders” by not implementing hand washing before eating. Unlike priests, whose qualifications are detailed in the Old Testament, there are no directives given as to the qualification of elders prior to those explicitly given by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

Beyond the influence one might have due to age, these elders seemed to have an authoritative role as well among the people, as they are seen lumped with chief priests and scribes in conspiring against Jesus, per Jesus Himself, who noted in Matthew 16:21 that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of “the elders and chief priests and scribes.” It was the “chief priests and the elders who took counsel against Jesus to put him to death” (Matt 27:1). It was the chief priests and the elders to whom betraying Judas returned the thirty pieces of silver (Matt 27:3). Also in Matthew 27, it is the elders, along with other groups, who are Christ’s
accusers and mockers, as well as among those who persuaded the crowd to “ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus” (Matt 27:20). The authority of the elders is even recognized by those outside the community of faith, as Luke 7:3 records a centurion sending elders of the Jews to solicit the help of Jesus. It was the “rulers of the people and elders” whom Peter addressed in Acts 4 regarding giving an account of the authority Peter had to spread the gospel.

It appears that the New Covenant community, the church, adopted and adapted the authoritative role of the Jewish elder and outlined specific roles for the new assembly and gave detailed instructions for their selection. The first reference to elders associated with the New Covenant community is in Acts 11:30, where relief is sent “to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.” In Acts 15, the authority of the elders is evident when joined with the apostles to consider the matter of the necessity of circumcision for Gentile converts. There the elders are also alongside the apostles in choosing those who would join Paul and Barnabas in going to Antioch. Acts 16:4 records the delivery for observance “the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.”

The importance of the elders linked with the apostles in such important decisions should not be quickly set aside, for one wonders who would hold the authoritative role within the New Covenant community after the apostles are no longer there, leaving behind only their writings and impact. After the apostles, there is no comparable category of leadership. It is also interesting to note that the book of revelation mentions elders, twenty-four elders to be precise (Rev 4, 5, 7, 11, 14, and 19), around the throne of God. They, in fact, sit of thrones of their own before God (Rev 11:16).

In Acts 14:23, a pattern is established that would become the norm thereafter, the appointing of elders “in every church.” That is, there would be elders (plural) in every church
(singular). Acts 11:30 mentions elders at the church of Antioch. The elders of the church in Jerusalem are referenced many times (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 21:18). The church in Philippi had elders and deacons (Phil 1:1). James 5:14 mentions the “elders of the church” and their role in prayer. The reason Paul left Titus in Crete, was so that he might “appoint elders in every town” (Titus 1:5). Since this era had one church per town, it should be evident that he is to appoint a plurality of leadership, elders, for each congregation. This pattern is so common, not only in that which is described, but also in that which is prescribed, that it has been concluded that there is no biblical evidence whatsoever to suggest that any church, “no matter how small,” had only one elder. 174 The burden of proof often befalls advocates of elder plurality, but it is only fair to note that a denomination or congregation with the more popular single elder/pastor model bears some burden of proof, as they would be operating contrary to the “unified and consistent pattern which every church had elders governing it and keeping watch over it.” 175

Elders’ Functions

In Acts 20, Paul called the “elders of the church” (20:17) and gave them explicit instructions. In Acts 20:28, 176 the elders are to keep an eye on (προσέχετε) one another, in which one could read accountability and care. Using the metaphor of the congregation as a flock of sheep, they are to shepherd (ποιμάνω) those over whom God the Holy Spirit has made them overseers (ἐπίσκοπος). To add more sobriety to the task, Paul reminds them that this flock is dear to God, who purchased it with His own blood. There is an implicit sense of accountability


175 Ibid.

176 Acts 20:28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. (ESV)
here, akin to that which explicitly stated for teachers in James 3:1 and also stated in Hebrews 13:1 where it is noted that leaders will give an account in how they do keeping watch over the souls entrusted to them.

Acts 20:28 is a key verse helping one to see the equivalency of the terms elder, shepherd/pastor, and overseer. From the context of talking to elders, whom Paul also calls overseers, it is clear that they are terms referring to the same group. What are they to do? They are to shepherd, or pastor, those assigned to them by God. Those terms, elder, overseer, and shepherd, while identifying the same people, are not synonymous. They instead help define different aspects of the work assigned to them. For simplicity, and in keeping with the dominant term, elders will be used to refer to the aforementioned group.

Elders are to rule (1 Tim 5:17). In 1 Timothy 3, elders are to oversee, manage, and “care for” (ἐπιμελέομαι), as in how the Good Samaritan “took care of” (ἐπιμελέομαι) the injured man in Luke 10, God’s church. According to Peter, elders are to “shepherd the flock of God, exercising oversight” (1 Peter 5:1-2). They are to be examples to the flock as they serve willingly and not in a domineering manner. If Acts 6:1-7 is a reference to the pattern of the delineation of elders and deacons within a congregation, then the elders are also to devote themselves to “prayer and the ministry of the word (λόγος)” (Acts 6:4). This can be seen in James’ admonition to call upon the elders for prayer when sick (James 5:14).

Elders and the Word

The ministry of the Word of God is seen in Paul’s insistence that the elder must be “able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9). Likewise, in giving instructions to Timothy regarding elders, the apostle requires that an elder be
“able to teach” (1 Tim 3:2). In Ephesians 4:11, Paul gives the only occurrence of shepherd (ποιμήν), “pastor” in the KJV, that is not tied to a literal shepherd of sheep or to the Lord Jesus, who is the “Good Shepherd” (John 10:11, 14). This can be seen as one office, the shepherd/teacher or two separate roles. For practical purposes regarding this thesis, the issue makes no difference, but if one were to separate the two, it could help explain why a church might have shepherds who do not teach and teachers who are not shepherds. Taking the first interpretive option, however, does not necessarily limit the role of teaching to shepherds.

1 Timothy 5:17 is sometimes used to distinguish elders who teach from those who do not. Paul wrote: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching (λόγος) and teaching.” It is noteworthy that, although English translations make a distinction between “preaching and teaching,” the word translated as “preaching” is λόγος, meaning word or speech, not κηρύσσω or εὐαγγελίζω. Translators may be inferring preaching from a similar construction in 2 Tim 4:2: “preach (κηρύσσω) the word (λόγος); be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (διδαχή).” There one also finds teaching distinct, yet related, and preaching tied to the content, the word (λόγος). Similarly, one is reminded of the pursuits of the Apostles, wanting to be freed up to focus on prayer and “ministry of the word (λόγος)” (Acts 6:4).

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177 One perspective on the distinction is that, it is a distinction between “preaching (expounding the Rod to the assembled congregation), and teaching (imparting instruction to the youth, to enquirers, and to all who stand in need of it.” William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, Thessalonians, the Pastorals, and Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 180. Another perspective is that preaching (λόγος) here “looks at public proclamation of the truth that includes exhortation and admonition, while teaching “emphasizes the idea of instruction more than proclamation.” MacArthur, 1 Timothy, 220. Getz gives another perspective, taking λόγος in the sense of speech and communication: “Paul was not limiting this responsibility to ‘teaching the Scriptures’ in a formal setting but rather to all that is involved in verbal communication. As anyone knows who is in a primary leadership role in the church, maintaining efficient and effective communication is a key to unity and oneness within the body of Jesus Christ—and it is one of the most demanding aspects of ministry.” Getz, Elders and Leaders, Ch 16, location 1867.
The following context, 1 Timothy 5:18, makes it apparent that the honor in question is compensation, not necessarily rank. Rather than delineation between elders who teach and those who do not, Paul is noting those whose labor is in preaching and teaching. One might say that their work, or vocation, is in serving the church as elders and they rule well. Consequently, the church should take care of them financially, so that they would be able to serve the church in that capacity. Thus, the church that is able could employ multiple elders, freeing them up from having to spend their time making a living; such a church should especially do so to liberate an elder to focus fully on teaching and preaching. All elders are to be able to teach, but some may have the ability to make their living doing so. It does not follow, however, that only employed elders should do certain forms of teaching (e.g., Sunday morning’s sermon) or that elders employed elsewhere are subordinate.

One might object that although an elder must be able to teach (e.g., 1 Tim 3:2), that is different than being able to preach, that is, delivering a Sunday morning sermon. Such a distinction, however, may not play out biblically in the same way the terms are commonly used in Christian circles. Popular concepts, such as “preaching is to the heart and teaching is to the head,” or seeing one as more energetic than the other, are without biblical foundation. Teaching comes from the Greek word διδάσκω, meaning to teach, as in teaching something or teaching someone. Preaching, in the ESV, for example, comes from the Greek word κηρύσσω, meaning to announce or proclaim, as in proclaiming a particular message, much as a herald would do. This is most readily seen in the numerous passages where one is proclaiming the gospel, or good


\[179\] Ibid., 431.
news about Jesus and the significance of His death, burial and resurrection, for the kingdom and potential subjects who may receive forgiveness via faith in Him.

Some may use the terms as synonyms, but the Bible does make a distinction between preaching and teaching. For example, there are texts which draw a distinction between the two by at least depicting them as two different activities, even if both occur. Jesus went to “teach and preach” in Matthew 11:1. In Luke 20:1, “Jesus was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel.” Similarly, the apostles did both according to Acts 5:42. “Every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching.” In Acts 15:35, Paul and Barnabas were “teaching and preaching the word of the Lord.” Paul exhorts Timothy to “preach” the Word, and to do so with “patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2).

Is teaching for all elders and preaching reserved for the paid clergy? That seems an unsupportable notion. Instead, if a distinction is to be made, it would seem teaching is what is done in the church by those in charge of the spiritual development of those within the body of Christ, whilst preaching of the gospel, in the sense of proclamation of said gospel with the intention of conversion, would take place outside of the church, and not during the Sunday morning sermon. Paul mentions the double honor due to elders who “labor in preaching and teaching,” seemingly indicating that some of the elders may make their living in such endeavors (1 Tim 5:17). There is a distinction between the two, but there is nothing in the biblical usage of the terms to indicate one is performed on a Sunday morning by a paid elder whilst the other may be performed by non-vocational elders in other venues. Teaching is part of making disciples, essential to the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28:18-20, and a priority task of the elders collectively in shepherding the flock entrusted to them.
Preaching, as typically envisioned by one standing in a pulpit to communicate an expository sermon, whereby the speaker has attempted to explain and apply the truth of a passage to the audience, would be more akin to the biblical concept of teaching. Preaching more in accord with the biblical terminology would be embodied in a street preacher proclaiming the good news of salvation in Jesus with an aim toward conversion to Christ. Matthew’s record of Christ’s ministry in Galilee gives an apt illustration of this distinction: “… teaching (διδάσκω) in their synagogues and proclaiming (κηρύσσω; KJV “preaching”) the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 4:23). Nonetheless, one can envision that most teaching will entail some preaching/proclaiming and most preaching/proclaiming will entail some teaching, so it is reasonable to see these as actions often in tandem, although distinct. For the purposes of this study, it is sufficient to show that an elder who is apt to teach is just as qualified to perform the type of teaching that is often called preaching, as in the preaching of a sermon, including on a Sunday morning.

There is nothing in Scripture to contradict the plurality, nor the parity of elders. They have the same qualifications, the same tasks, and the same authority. The only distinction made among elders is in the above reference to those whom the church should take care of financially, those who rule well and especially if their area of emphasis is preaching and teaching, since, “The laborer deserves his wages” (1 Tim 5:18). Paul also quotes Deuteronomy 25:4 elsewhere, making it clear that it is not unreasonable for those who labor for believers spiritually to reap benefits from the congregation materially (1 Cor 9:6-12). Paul’s rhetorical question in 1 Corinthians 9:6180 and his usage of the Old Testament verse in 1 Timothy 5 makes it clear that those qualified elders have the right “refrain from working for a living.”

180 1 Cor 9:6 Or is it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? (ESV)
Theoretical Foundations

Church Polity

Different Christian traditions over the years have implemented different structures for church government and have often disagreed vociferously. It is acknowledged that the Bible is not as explicit in these matters as perhaps one would like, which gives rise to humility and an aversion to dogmatism in evaluation, or perhaps at least it should. The Bible, as has been shown, however, is far from silent on the divinely ordained ecclesiastical roles. Christians desiring to be faithful to the Bible’s dictates must attempt to implement them.

One approach is referred to as an episcopal polity. In such a scenario, an overseer, often called a “bishop,” is over an area and subsequently multiple congregations. The congregations would have elders in the congregation by various names, such as minister or pastor. There is often strong demarcation between the clergy and the laity. This approach fails to see the equivalence of the elder and bishop and shepherd.

A similar approach is seen among many Presbyterian groups, where there is a presbytery over congregations. Within those congregations the government will consist of the session, which is made up of lay elders, at times divided between shepherding and ruling elders. The primary preacher or teacher is the teaching elder, who may not be a member of the congregation or session, but rather the presbytery. Allowing for elders who rule but do not teach, especially if the requirement of being able to teach is ignored, hinders the elders from doing that which is part of their assigned tasks. Such churches would not be maximizing the gifts that God had given to the congregation, or perhaps worse, they may be designating as elders those who do not meet the qualification given in 1 Timothy 3 that an elder is one able to teach.
In a congregational approach, there is no human authority outside of the congregation itself. The church government will consist of one elder, typically called the pastor, or multiple elders. Those elders may exhibit parity or a hierarchy, often with a strong distinction between the clergy and the laity. In such a scenario, it is often the ordained clergy who is employed by the church. A church with only one elder not only loses a level of accountability, but it also fails to experience the complementary nature of leaders working together with varied strengths and weaknesses, compensating for one another. As was noted above, in this scenario as well, churches with elders who do not teach or are seen as having limitations upon them, hinder those elders from developing and exercising the gifts God gave them with which to serve the congregation.

It should be noted that one of the concerns regarding elder polity, namely a plurality of elders, is that it is inconsistent with congregationalism. That is, however, a non sequitor. Having one elder, the pastor, or having multiple elders has no necessary bearing on the role of the congregational. Similarly, congregationalism does entail that there is no greater human authority outside of the congregation, but it does not require each and every decision is made by the congregation. There is often the illusion of a democratic approach specified in Scripture whereby decisions are all made by the congregation voting. Although there are instances of congregations making decisions, there is no indication they made every decision. Instead, it would seem, they are involved in making so-called major decisions.\textsuperscript{181} The congregations empower to some degree their church officers, whether they be called pastors, elders, or deacons, or staff, to tend to certain areas of responsibility, with the ability to make decisions therein. It may seem undemocratic to not have the congregation weigh in on every decision, which is

\textsuperscript{181} For example, it is the congregation that has ultimate authority with regard to church discipline (e.g., Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:1-11; 2 Cor 2:5-11).
perhaps why some churches do have seemingly each and every decision made in accord with *Robert’s Rules of Order* in regular business meetings. It is, however, not un-American, as it may be perceived, since representative government is the American system, or even unbiblical, which is, of course, of greater interest to this study. Congregations entrusting a certain degree of authority and leadership to those deemed spiritually mature and vetted by the congregation is the biblical pattern, whether that is one pastor/elder or multiple elders, is certainly in accord with biblical directives.

In response to the aforementioned concern among some Baptists that a move to elder plurality is a move to becoming Presbyterian, it is important to note two things. First, congregations should strive to do that which is most in accord with God’s revelation for governance in Scripture, regardless of what other congregations or denominations do or do not practice it. Secondly, two chief differences between the two traditions would be congregationalism among Baptists and the roles of those elders. While Presbyterians might use 1 Timothy 5:17 to draw a distinction between elders who rule and those who teach, Baptists historically have not done so, though it is a legitimate concern that a Baptist congregation employing some elders could see them as preaching or teaching elders and the others as instead ruling elders.

Each of these primary government structures may designate a variety of staff positions to perform and/or oversee the various ministries of the church. Each of them would likely have or allow for a plurality of deacons, even if the church would insist on singularity in the eldership. In each of these options, the main, Sunday morning teaching or preaching would be exclusive to the clergy, often the paid pastor/minister.
Elder Polity: Plurality and Parity

In keeping with the aforementioned directives from Scripture, the elders of the church should collectively shepherd the flock. That would include the Sunday morning preaching; it is one of the ways in which an elder shepherds the flock, feeding the sheep. There would be parity among the elders, even though one or more of them might have more opportunities to preach due to having their employment taken care of by the church. Should the church have vocational elders who become more proficient and dynamic in the preaching role, it should not diminish the role of the other elders in that regard. The difference between the vocational and non-vocational elders would be one of quantity, not quality, in the sense that each elder would be qualified for their tasks, though some due to gifting or employment may do some things more often than the other elders, like preaching.
Chapter 3

Methodology

Chapter 1 identified a problem regarding the elders at Providence Church of Texas. This action research was undertaken to address that problem. Chapter 2 introduced theological and theoretical foundations in addition to a review of germane literature. These shaped the following methodology, which was designed to address the problem, with the goal of bringing the church’s reality into greater conformity with the Bible’s described and prescribed aspects of church government regarding elders, especially with regard to teaching and preaching in the life of the congregation.

Intervention Design

Project Conceptualization

The intervention plan was to address the lack of parity among the elders, seen most clearly in perceptions of suitability regarding Sunday morning preaching. A process of education about the role of the elder within the congregation, particularly as it relates to teaching and preaching, was implemented. The goal was for the elders to better understand their role within the church, especially as it relates to preaching. As a result, the hope was that they would be better prepared and more inclined to get preaching experience to further develop their confidence and competence.

There is a distinct difference between the vocational elder and the non-vocational elders with regard to their confidence and competence in preaching. Consequently, the congregation often sees an unbiblical difference between the “pastor,” who is employed by the church, and the other elders. An increase in education and experience would not only help the non-vocational
elders grow in their confidence and confidence in preaching, but it will impact the congregation’s understanding of the plurality and parity of elder government. This should show itself in their expectation of the non-vocational elders to not only preach the Sunday sermon on occasion, but also to be available for counseling, mentoring, and various other aspects of shepherding the flock.

From the church’s inception in 2006 until the time of this study, there has been no intentional formal process of training non-vocational elders for service in that role. At Providence Church, the elders would typically begin to look for a man in the church who had been a member for at least a year who had demonstrated spiritual maturity, a love for the people, and an ability to communicate well God’s Word, typically in Sunday school, or perhaps by participating in the church’s Good Friday service, which employs seven speakers, and one who seemed to be likeminded with the other elders theologically and regarding philosophy of ministry. While the church may have no regrets in its selections, has the lack of a training process limited elder effectiveness? Has Providence Church unwittingly contributed to “widespread confusion” regarding those interested in pastoral ministry by neglecting its “divine mandate to prepare the next generation of shepherds of God’s flock”?^{182}

Beginning with this action research project, the present elders and future elders would go through a two-phase process of training. The first, the education regarding the role of the eldership, including non-vocational elders, is the subject of this study. The second, a future effort, would entail subsequent experience to enable them to take that newfound and/or solidified knowledge and put it into practice by preparing and presenting expository sermons with a view toward occasional Sunday morning proficiency.

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The plan was to begin this education project in the fall of 2020. That would entail multiple group training sessions with the church elders, on a monthly basis. The intention was to give them an assessment early fall and assess them again after the training, to see if there had been a marked change in their understanding of the role of the elder based on the educational aspect of the process.

Method

Through the researcher’s experience and observation as a founding elder and employed pastor of the church, it has been apparent since its inception that the church has treated those in the elder role differently based on being vocational or non-vocational elders. Through discussions, bordering on unintentional interviews, the researcher has ascertained that the non-vocational elders have been prone to view themselves differently categorically, due to lack of education and/or experience, but primarily due to vocation; they are not employed as a “pastor.” For the purpose of this study, however, the primary means of assessment is via a questionnaire.

The researcher had originally planned a pre and post survey with the elders to test their knowledge of what the Bible teaches along the lines of a Likert scale. For example, they might strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with a biblical concept regarding the role of the elder. However, there can be limitations with regard to surveys in such a scenario. Stringer notes that, "Surveys are of limited utility in the first phases of an action research process because they provide very limited information and are likely to reflect the perspective, interests, and agenda of the researcher."\(^{183}\) The researcher’s own bias could “lead the witness,” so to speak, and even come across as condescending.

Instead, a questionnaire was deemed more fitting, whereby more open-ended questions could be asked about how they would describe the role of elder and how they would articulate the relationship between an elder, pastor, and/or overseer, for example. Using that same questionnaire after the process might seem less quantitative in nature, but it would probably offer more personalized responses, as opposed to limiting their options.

Participant Learning Objectives

The overarching goal for the project was for the elders to better understand the nature of their role as elders, regardless of vocational status, to embolden them to more effectively and collectively shepherd the flock, including in the area of teaching on a Sunday morning. Direct benefits to the elders themselves would include an increased and/or reinforced biblical understanding of their role in the church as one among equals, with the difference being the workload and not the type of work per se. Indirect benefits to the elders would be a greater desire to shepherd the flock through teaching, including Sunday mornings, having now been equipped with education and a desire for more experience. The indirect benefits to the congregation were to be higher quality teaching from the elders in general and a strengthened relationship with the shepherds beyond the elder(s) employed by the congregation.

To those ends, each of the teaching sessions had a learning objective for the elders. Teaching Session One was to address the role of elders throughout the Old and New Testaments, including first-century Jewish life. The educational objective was to spotlight the biblical term and office of elder to show the continuity through the Mosaic Covenant and New Covenant as well as the modification that takes place in the New Covenant. The elders were to see the role of elders as collectively the highest human authority within a particular congregation.
Teaching Session Two was to address the equivalence of biblical terms referring to church leadership, namely, that elders, overseers, and shepherds/pastors are not synonymous, but refer to the same group of people. The consensus of Scripture would show that elders and overseers were the same individuals and they were collectively tasked with shepherding, or pastoring, the flock. The educational objective was for the non-vocational elders to see themselves as categorically not distinct from the elder called, “pastor,” who was employed by the congregation, but rather as part of the same team with shared authority and responsibility.

Teaching Session Three was to focus on the plurality and parity of church leadership, that is, the plurality and parity of elders in leading the church. The educational objective was for the elders who are not employed by the church to see themselves as having the same authority and responsibility to lead the congregation as one who may be employed to do that role. In other words, the non-vocational elders should not see themselves as inferior or in any way less due to the nature of their status in contrast to one employed. They were to see themselves as sharing the same work, though not necessarily the same workload.

Teaching Session Four was to address the importance of teaching in shepherding. Rather than seeing the pastor as the preacher and the elders as teachers, the biblical terms would be examined to understand the essence of teaching. The educational objective was for the elders to see the Sunday morning sermon as a subset of teaching, for which they were necessarily qualified, and for which they were chiefly tasked in fulfilling their duties of shepherding the flock, so that they would see to develop their skills through further education and experience in that particular task.
Logistics

Preliminaries

Before implementing the action research in the context of Providence Church of Texas, the researcher’s mentor educated the researcher on the process and the proper sequence to addressing necessary measures. The researcher would have to clarify the problem, identify the course of action, and settle on means of assessment. The researcher would then have to secure approval from the Institutional Review Board regarding the intended research. The subsequent action research project would serve as the culmination of the researcher’s pursuit of the Doctor of Ministry degree.

Permissions

Prior to working with human subjects, receiving IRB approval for the study was required. Upon securing IRB authorization, the IRB approved facilities request form was submitted. On behalf of the church elders, Jay Porterfield authorized the usage of the church’s building for the research project. The IRB approved consent forms were then distributed to the church elders to give them time to read and ask questions, if necessary, prior to the beginning of the study. They were to be collected at the same time as the first questionnaire would be administered.

In the consent form, the elders were informed that, “The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of an educational process designed to equip the elders to more effectively serve the congregation of Providence Church of Texas.” Their participation was

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184 Appendix A
185 Appendix B
186 Appendix C
voluntary, but each of the elders brought his signed consent form to the first teaching session (i.e., the elders meeting of September 15, 2020).

Course Materials

Participants were not required to purchase or even bring anything to the sessions. The researcher would have writing utensils and church Bibles (ESV) on hand, though it is not uncommon for an elder to bring his Bible to an elders meeting and they would likely have access to a Bible on their mobile phones. Each session, the participants were provided a handout to help them follow along with the teaching and/or upon which they could take notes. The handouts could also be used to reinforce or review the information to which they had been exposed. The handouts were created by the researcher to coincide with the participant learning objectives of each of the teaching sessions are included among the appendices.

Recruitment

At a regularly scheduled elders meeting, the elders were be informed of the intervention planned. In keeping with their collective support for the researcher’s academic pursuits, their informal approval was secured prior to the more formal process of securing their participation. The elders individually were solicited for participation and communicated that formally via the signing of a consent form. The researcher, who also serves as the only vocational elder of the church, prepared the questionnaire, the consent form, and the content of the curriculum used to address the problem.

\[\text{\footnotesize 187 The church’s elders typically meet monthly, barring the unexpected need to meet for a particularly pressing issue, or to schedule around calendar disruptions.}\]
The researcher taught the sessions and administered the questionnaires in the context of monthly scheduled elders meetings, taking place September 15, October 8, November 5, and December 4, 2020. The convenience of already having the elders assembled at the church building led to this decision. In addition, the elders meetings already had an established pattern wherein agenda item number one was always reserved for an elder to share something he had been studying with the rest of the group. Historically, that slot was not previously claimed, so that any of the elders would feel at liberty to share during the meeting, but for the duration of the action research study, it was known ahead of time that much of the meeting’s time would be consumed with that first agenda item whereby the researcher would share the teaching sessions. Each of the four meetings took place in the same Sunday school classroom, which facilitated teaching, discussion, and notes on the whiteboard when/if so desired. The room usually accommodated up to twelve for education, but the size was ideal in that it was small enough to be intimate for conversation, while at the same time allowing for social distancing from one another. This was important since the sessions took place during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Meeting remotely, via Zoom, for example, was considered, as precedent had been set in the past whereby an elder might need to “attend” virtually. However, in the estimation of the researcher, meeting face-to-face for the sessions helped facilitate not only the communication of the material from researcher, but it also better facilitated conversation and instantaneous feedback to the researcher on the effectiveness of the aforementioned instruction.

In gauging the success of the education process, the results of the post-process questionnaire reign supreme in such determination. Ideally, the questionnaire would show a greater understanding that the differences between a vocational and non-vocational elder are not categorical, but relate instead to the amount of time available to serve in that capacity and
proficiency due to experience. Better than expected, however, was the feedback received during the teaching sessions, which showed the elders’ assessment of the worthiness of such instruction. The hope was that the plan of education regarding the role of elders, including with regard to preaching and teaching, would not only give the current elders a better understanding of the biblical expectations of them, but also give them a greater confidence in that task. This would better prepare them for a future phase of experience, whereby they can cultivate and test their homiletics skills.

**Implementation of the Intervention Design**

**Evaluation Tools**

**Questionnaire: Pre-Test**

The elders meeting took place on September 15, 2020, at 11:30AM, in one of the children’s Sunday school rooms. The researcher distributed to each participant a copy of the meeting’s agenda and the questionnaire. After an opening prayer, the researcher introduced the questionnaire with the instructions that they were not to put their names on their papers, but only to answer the four questions in the space provided. Each elder seemed to briefly read over the questionnaire in full before beginning to respond to the questions. The first one was completed after approximately nine minutes. The last one was completed after approximately twelve minutes. They were then all handed in to the researcher, who sorted them in alphabetical order by last name. This was done with a view of being able compare each of the elders’ responses with the responses he would give in the questionnaire after the instruction.

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188 Appendix D
Questionnaire: Post-Test

In the context of the elders meeting of December 4, 2020, the questionnaire\textsuperscript{189} was distributed to the elders at the end of the fourth teaching session. This activity was essentially the conclusion of the first agenda item of elder presentation. They were again instructed not to put their names on their papers, but as they were handed in, the researcher was careful to sort them in alphabetical order by each elder’s last name. The first one was completed in approximately ten minutes, and the last one was completed in approximately fourteen minutes.

Sessions

Teaching Session One: Elders as Leaders

The first teaching session was a continuation of the elder presentation agenda item of the elders meeting on September 15, 2020. After receiving the completed questionnaires, the researcher distributed a handout\textsuperscript{190} to each of the participants. The handout contained Scripture addresses, but the researcher’s notes\textsuperscript{191} contained the full Scripture quotations for each from the ESV. The researcher noted that the term elder was not novel for the New Testament. Instead the term is common in the Old Testament, particularly with regard to the expression, “elders of Israel,” who were summoned for insight and/or accountability.

It was explained that the elders of Israel were an already established group, for when they were first mentioned in Exodus 3:16 it is so that Moses can inform them of the good news that God has seen the plight of Israel. They are to accompany Moses to communicate to Pharaoh the message God had regarding letting His people go (Ex 3:18). In Exodus 24, seventy of the elders

\textsuperscript{189} Appendix D
\textsuperscript{190} Appendix E
\textsuperscript{191} Appendix F
of Israel accompany Moses, Aaron, and two of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, up the mountain to meet with the Lord. To further illustrate the authoritative role of the elders, Leviticus 4:15 was referenced to show the “elders of the congregation” as participants in the sin offering by the laying on of hands.

The prominence of elders was shown to be attached to accountability, presumably due to their authority. Ezekiel 20:3 was quoted to show the stern rebuke God gives to the elders of Israel. Likewise, it was to the elders in Joel 1:2 to whom Joel issued his words of warning: “Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land!” Psalm 107:32 was quoted to show role of the “assembly of elders” in the context of congregational life. Similarly, when moving the ark of the covenant in 1 Kings 8:1, King Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and the heads of the tribes. After writing the law, in Deuteronomy 31:9, Moses gave it to “the priests, the sons of Levi” and “to all the elders of Israel.” The authority of the elders collectively is seen in Deuteronomy 27:1, which reads, “Now Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, ‘Keep the whole commandment that I command you today.’”

The researcher showed that, in the New Testament gospels, the elders are still portrayed as those respected with some measure of influence and authority in the community. For example, Jesus is rebuked in Matthew 15:2 because His disciples broke “the tradition of the elders” by not implementing hand washing before eating. Beyond the influence one might have due to age, these elders seemed to have an authoritative role as well among the people, as they are seen lumped with chief priests and scribes in conspiring against Jesus, per Jesus Himself, who noted in Matthew 16:21 that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of “the elders and chief priests and scribes.” It was noted that, it was the “chief priests and the elders who took counsel against Jesus to put him to death” (Matt 27:1). It was the chief priests and the elders to
whom betraying Judas returned the thirty pieces of silver (Matt 27:3). Also in Matthew 27, it was the elders, along with other groups, who are Christ’s accusers and mockers, as well as among those who persuaded the crowd to “ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus” (Matt 27:20). The authority of the elders in first century Jewish life was shown to even be recognized by those outside the community of faith, as Luke 7:3 records a centurion sending elders of the Jews to solicit the help of Jesus. In Acts 4 (4:5, 8, 23), it was the “rulers of the people and elders” whom Peter addressed regarding giving an account of the authority Peter had to spread the gospel.

The conclusion shared was that it appears that the New Covenant community, the church, adopted and adapted the authoritative role of the Jewish elder and outlined specific roles for the new assembly and gave detailed instructions for their selection. Unlike priests, whose qualifications are detailed in the Old Testament, there are no directives given as to the qualification of elders prior to those explicitly given by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.

It was pointed out that the first reference to elders associated with the New Covenant community is in Acts 11:30, where relief is sent “to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.” In Acts 15, the authority of the elders is evident when joined with the apostles to consider the matter of the necessity of circumcision for Gentile converts (15:2, 4, 6). There, the elders were shown alongside the apostles in choosing those who would join Paul and Barnabas in going to Antioch (15:22, 23). Acts 16:4 records the delivery for observance “the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.” Time was spent here to emphasize that the importance of the elders being linked with the apostles in such important decisions should not be quickly set aside, for one wonders who would hold the authoritative role within the New Covenant community after the apostles were no longer there, leaving behind only their writings and impact. After the apostles, it was explained, there is no comparable
category of leadership. It was also noted that the book of revelation mentions elders, twenty-four elders to be precise (Rev 4, 5, 7, 11, 14, and 19), around the throne of God. They in fact, sit of thrones of their own before God (Rev 11:16).

With regard to elders in congregational life, the researcher noted that in Acts 14:23 a pattern is established that would become the norm thereafter, the appointing of elders “in every church.” That is, there would be elders (plural) in every church (singular). Acts 11:30 mentions elders at the church of Antioch. It was pointed out that the elders of the church in Jerusalem are referenced many times (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 21:18). The church in Philippi had elders and deacons (Phil 1:1). James 5:14 was shown to mention the “elders of the church” and their role in prayer. The reason Paul left Titus in Crete, was so that he might “appoint elders in every town” (Titus 1:5). Since this era had one church per town, it was concluded that Titus is to appoint a plurality of leadership, elders, for each congregation.

The researcher concluded the teaching in the session by stating that, “The authoritative role of the elder in the life of God’s covenant people is established in the Old Covenant community, but later refined and defined as the highest human authority within a particular congregation.” The subsequent discussion noted initial surprise upon seeing the continuity of authoritative role of the elders in both testaments. The participants were engaged throughout and took notes at times. Comments were not limited to the end, but during that final discussion, one participant astutely commented upon the transition in authoritative offices: Israel: Prophets, priests, kings, and elders; New Testament Jewish life: Priests, scribes, the Sanhedrin, and elders; New Testament early church life: Apostles and elders; and church life after the apostles: Elders.
Teaching Session Two: Elders = Overseers = Shepherds/Pastors

The session again occurred within the context of a monthly-scheduled elders meeting, with the teaching being the first item on the agenda. The meeting began on October 8, 2020, at 11:30AM, in the same children’s Sunday school room. The researcher distributed to each participant a copy of the meeting’s agenda and the handout.192 Although the vast majority of the biblical texts that would be referenced were quoted in full in the handout, the researcher’s notes193 included commentary and transitional points to be made.

After a reminder of the prior session’s emphasis on the role of the elder in the life of God’s covenant people, the researcher shared the Greek word πρεσβύτερος, which is translated as elder in English translations. The resemblance to its transliteration and the preponderance of Presbyterian churches who have utilize the term and recognize its preeminence was noted, along with the disclaimer that many operate with categorical distinctions among different types of elder, which would be examined in a later session. The lesson’s preview was such that the biblical text would show that elders, overseers, and shepherds/pastors refer to the same individuals.

A new term was introduced, ἐπίσκοπος, which is typically translated as overseer, though it is bishop in the King James Version of the Bible. The instances of the Greek term in the New Testament were shared to show that Paul highlighted the “overseers and deacons” of the church in his opening salutation to the epistle of the Philippians. The text to which many turn when looking to the requirements for a church leader (i.e., pastor), 1 Timothy 3, begins by noting that one aspiring to the office of overseer desires a noble task before giving the requirements for an overseer to be “above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled,

192 Appendix G
193 Appendix H
respectable, hospitable, able to teach,” etc. (1 Tim 3:2). Similarly, Titus’ requirements for an overseer begin in Titus 1:7, “For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain.” It was noted that the only other instance of ἐπίσκοπος in the epistles refers to Jesus, “the Shepherd and Overseer” of the souls of His people (1 Peter 2:25).

That text helped to transition to the term shepherd (n. ποιμήν, v. ποιμάω), another term used to describe those who are to lead local congregations. Like elder, it is a term rich in meaning in the Old Testament. The researcher had the participants turn to and read Ezekiel 34:1-24 to see the rebuke God gives to those who are being unfaithful “shepherds of Israel,” who were feeding themselves and not the sheep (34:2). By way of contrast, God would personally care for His sheep (34:15) and install a shepherd for them, His servant David (34:23-24), an allusion to the Son of David, the Christ, who was to come. The participants were reminded of another famous connection between God, David, and the metaphor of shepherd, namely, Psalm 23, wherein God was David’s shepherd. The nature of such care was described through reading and commenting upon Psalm 23, in order to give insight into what shepherding should look like in contemporary churches.

It was noted that, just as the term elder can have a general definition alongside a more specific, nuanced ecclesiastical usage, so it is with the noun shepherd (ποιμήν), which is “pastor” in some translations of Ephesian 4:11. Such literal occurrences were seen in the familiar Luke 2 Christmas story passage where shepherds were in the field tending their flocks by night (2:8). After the message of the Messiah’s birth, in nearby Bethlehem, the city of David, who had been a shepherd himself, perhaps at times in that same field, these shepherds went to investigate
(2:15). These shepherds shared what they saw (2:18) and glorified God for what He had shown them (2:20).

That scene was a smooth transition to speaking of Jesus as chief shepherd. Starting with Matthew, it was shown that Jesus would fulfill prophecy, as Matthew 2:6 was noted: “And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd (ποιμαίνω) my people Israel.” Jesus had compassion on the crowds, “because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt 9:36). Jesus, it was pointed out, was of course the one God had sent to be their shepherd. It was noted that Jesus, upon His second coming, would separate the nations “as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (Matt 25:32).

Jesus explained to His disciples that they would fall away, since the sheep would be scattered when the shepherd of the flock was struck (Matt 26:31). The participants were directed to John 10, where Jesus noted that He was the “shepherd of the sheep” (10:2), “the good shepherd” (10:14) who would lay down “His life for the sheep” (10:11). By way of example, Jesus helps those serving as shepherds see the expectation to care for the sheep and not flee (10:12). To those serving as shepherds, such as the participants of this study, Jesus gives a reminder that the sheep are ultimately His (10:16) and should be regarded as such. This prompted discussion regarding the expectation for elders to care for the sheep, as opposed to seeing them as a means for personal gain or prestige.

Outside of Christ’s self-identification as the shepherd of His people, other passages were referenced to solidify the biblical metaphor. For example, in Hebrews 13:20, the resurrected Lord Jesus is referred to as the “great shepherd of the sheep.” The aforementioned 1 Peter 2:25 speaks of Jesus as the “Shepherd and Overseer” of souls. Peter also refers to Jesus, in a passage
directed to the elders, as “the chief Shepherd” (1 Peter 5:4). Revelation is known for imagery and metaphor, so it was not a surprise for the participants to see “the Lamb” as the shepherd who would be a guide “to springs of living water” (7:7). It was pointed out that the vast majority of references to Jesus were to Him as shepherd (n. ποιμήν), but two significant instances with Jesus shepherdng (v. ποιμάίνω) were noted, even though they do not readily show up as such in English translations. The first was Revelation 12:5, which states, “She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule (ποιμάίνω) all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne.” Similarly a common second coming passage was shared: “From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule (ποιμαίνω) them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty” (Rev 19:15).

Those instances of the term were given to establish a context for which church leaders can understand their role as shepherds of God’s people. The researcher also shared such a quantity of biblical instances to also contrast the scant usage of the term shepherd in the context of a local church. It was noted that many people would likely say that the leader of the church should be the pastor, but one would look in vain to find that term in some translations, like the ESV, for example. The researcher pointed out the fact that there is only one instance of ποιμήν being used in reference to a church leader, Ephesians 4:11, which notes that, God “gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds (“pastors” in KJV) and teachers” for the sake of the church. The researcher used this as an opportunity to raise the question about what the leaders of the churches should be called, whether elders or overseers or pastors/shepherds.

Lest the participants think shepherding or pastoring is a foreign concept with regard to their obligations, a few key passages were shared. First, Christ’s command to Peter in response
to Peter’s assertion that he did indeed love Jesus was noted, since Jesus said to him, “Tend (ποιμαίνω) my sheep” (John 21:16). Peter himself then communicates that same sentiment in one of the two passages that were dealt with in great detail to understand the expectation of church leaders. He states, “So I exhort the elders (πρεσβύτερος) among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd (ποιμαίνω) the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight (ἐπισκόπω), not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly” (1 Peter 5:1-2). The conclusion drawn was that elders are to shepherd the flock, overseeing it, noting the verbal form (ἐπισκόπω) associated with overseer (ἐπίσκοπος). This passage addresses the elders to shepherd/pastor by overseeing and the researcher labored to show Peter’s admonition as one that not only brings together the terms of elder, overseer/overseeing, and shepherd/shepherding, but it also was instrumental in showing that all three refer to the same individuals. The researcher concluded the examination and discussion by noting that elders are expected to shepherd the flock, overseeing it.

A similar passage was used from Acts 20, though it was noted that this one also demonstrated the plurality of elders for a local congregation. In other words, it was noted that instead of the contemporary tradition of one elder per congregation, even the early church evidences leaders plural for a congregation singular. As that concept was to be revisited in the next teaching session, it was only lightly addressed here. Instead, the emphasis was on seeing the terms elders, overseers, and shepherds as referring to the same group in a church. Per Paul, it was explained, elders, in their role as overseers, were to shepherd the flock. The participants were directed to turn to Acts 20, where verses 17-30 were read. It was noted that, in 20:17, Paul called for the elders of the church of Ephesus to come to him for his farewell address. One verse
in particular was highlighted. “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock (ποιμνιον), in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (ἐπισκοπος), to care for (ποιμάνω; feed KJV, shepherd NASB) the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). The passage was shown to equate elders with overseers, those tasked with shepherding the church to which they had been assigned.

The researcher read from the handout that, “Elders, overseers, and shepherds are not synonymous terms, but do refer to the same group of people.” The discussion that ensued reflected the collective understanding that, contrary to some traditions, elders, overseers, and pastors are not distinct or bearing different levels of authority or responsibility. Instead, it was expressed, that they are different was of referring to the same people or the different tasks assigned to the same people. To wrap up the discussion and elder presentation portion of the elders meeting, and, therefore, the teaching session, the following was read from the handout: “That the titles elder, pastor, and overseer all describe the same person is made clear by the use of all three words to describe the same person in Acts 20:17, 28. The term ‘pastor’ emphasizes their shepherding or feeding function, ‘overseer’ their authority and leading function, and ‘elder’ their spiritual maturity.”194

Teaching Session Three: Elder Plurality and Parity

The session again occurred within the context of a monthly-scheduled elders meeting, with the teaching being the first item on the agenda. The meeting began on November 5, 2020, at 11:30AM, in the same children’s Sunday school room in the Providence Church building. The researcher distributed to each participant a copy of the meeting’s agenda and the session’s

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handout. The researcher’s notes differed in that they contained some comments in red, though the comments were modified to italics when included below. The session’s instruction began with a reminder of that which was introduced previously, namely a plurality of leadership for a congregation. The researcher gave a preview of the major themes of the session, the plurality and parity of leadership as described in the Bible. It was noted that Providence Church’s polity of a plurality of elders is a minority within the Southern Baptist Convention. However, a historical perspective was given to demonstrate that it is not a novel nor unique approach in Baptist life. A review of Baptist doctrinal statements validated the polity.

For example, it was noted that the “London Baptist Confession of Faith” (1644/46) dictates that each local church is to choose qualified “elders and deacons” for the “feeding, governing, serving, and building up” of the church. Similarly, the “London Baptist Confession of Faith” (1689), also known as the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, notes that the officers of the church are “bishops or elders, and deacons.” The first Southern Baptist doctrinal statement, the “Abstract of Principles” (1858), which is still the governing doctrinal statement at both The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY, and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC, lists church officers as “Bishops or Elders, and Deacons.” It also happens to be the framework from which the Providence Church statement of faith was built. The “Baptist Faith and Message” (1925) noted that the “Scriptural officers are bishops, or elders, and deacons.” It was noted that being faithful to the directives of Scripture was/is the goal, regardless of tradition, but that it was validating to have historical precedence for the church’s form of governance.

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195 Appendix I
196 Appendix J
The biblical validation was emphasized once again, which was somewhat a review. It was noted that the descriptive and prescriptive pattern of church leadership was consistently a plurality of leadership in each church, with those leaders referred to as elders and/or overseers. By way of review, it was noted that those are terms referring to the same group of people, who collectively shepherd the flock. In Acts 14:23 a pattern is established that would become the norm thereafter, the appointing of elders “in every church.” That is, there would be elders (plural) in every church (singular). Acts 11:30 mentions elders at the church of Antioch. The elders of the church in Jerusalem are referenced many times (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 21:18). The church in Philippi had elders and deacons (Phil 1:1). James 5:14 mentions the “elders of the church” and their role in prayer. The reason Paul left Titus in Crete, so that he might “appoint elders in every town” (Titus 1:5). Since this era had one church per town, it should be evident that Titus is to appoint a plurality of leadership, elders, for each congregation.

To highlight the notion of parity within the church’s leadership, the researcher referred the participants to the constitution of Providence Church. It noted that, “The elders shall exercise oversight over the church ministries and functions and have the general oversight over all of this church's affairs.” The point made was that the elders collectively were to exercise general oversight, not merely those elders employed by the church. Similarly, the constitution noted that, “The conduct of all church business and the work of all church organizations shall be subject to their supervision and oversight.” Again, it was noted that the supervision and oversight was a collective responsibility. The researcher showed that the church constitution continues in regard to their collective tasks to note that, “In keeping with biblical principles (e.g., Acts 6:1–6 and 1 Peter 5:1–4), the elders shall devote their time to prayer, to the ministry of the Word (by teaching and encouraging sound doctrine), and to leading, guiding, and shepherding
God’s flock.” The point emphasized by the researcher was that the church constitution reflected the biblical patterns of plurality and parity with regard to a church’s elders.

However, it was pointed out that a potential source of confusion could arise, if it had not already, from the distinction made between vocational and non-vocational elders. In other words, how did Providence Church delineate between those elders employed by the church and those employed elsewhere or retired? The researcher noted that, for the moment, the question of whether or not it was biblically defensible to pay an elder, or to pay some and not others, would be set aside. It was explained that the church constitution articulated a plurality and parity with regard to the elders. The constitution, however, also made a special category for one of those elders, the one referred to as “the pastor,” one who would be an elder employed by the congregation. The constitution states that the pastor “shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching.” The following from the handout was read: “The (senior) pastor shall be an elder and shall, therefore, perform the duties of an elder described in Section 2. He shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching. He shall preach on the Lord’s Day, officiate at the observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and perform such other duties as usually pertain to that office.”

In referencing the church’s constitution, the researcher acknowledged the limitations for other churches that might adopt aspects of the educational process implemented, yet doing so was not only a reminder of the foundations of the church, but also an opportunity to evaluate those foundations through biblical and practical lenses. Discussion at this point in the session centered around the intent of the constitution to reflect the Scriptures, but also as to the feasibility of having a different label for an elder or elders who are employed by the
congregation. The pros and cons of that demarcation were brought up with the intention of revisiting in the session.

The verbiage of calling, with regard to one labeled pastor in the constitution was discussed. It was asked, “Is the calling to ministry something unique to the elders employed full-time by the church?” What does it mean to be called? It was noted that the common language, which is even required by seminaries, is an individual calling from God Himself, whereby the one called must obey or be in sin. It was discussed if that is legitimate and how, if so, that occurs. Does one hear an audible voice? Is it a subjective conviction? Can one be called and not be employed, supposing, for example, no church hires the individual? These questions and more were discussed before referencing the related Scriptures.

The Apostle Paul notes that, “If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Timothy 3:1). The researcher put an emphasis on the term “desires,” whilst noting that our English terminology of vocation comes from the Latin term vocare, meaning, to call. In a sense, one might say any vocation is one’s calling in life, as many Puritans would attest, but something more is often implied and inferred when such language is used in Christian circles. Apart from Paul’s self-reference to being audibly and personally called to be an apostle by the risen Jesus (e.g., Rom 1:1; 1 Cor 1:1; 15:9), the New Testament does not speak of one being called to ministry as a vocation by God. It was noted, however, by the researcher, that there are an overwhelming number of references in the New Testament to the theological concept of effectual calling; whereby all of God’s people are called by Him and to Him and to holiness. Yet, there is often a perception that vocational, ordained elders are called to ministry by God, so that they should be paid, but other elders are just regular people whom God did call

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197 See Appendix K for the abundance of examples of God’s calling of all believers effectually, in contrast to the way the term is used to speak of a person who subjectively senses a desire to serve God in a certain way.
to shepherd the flock. The researcher explained that such a perception is unfounded in the Bible. Instead, he noted that it is perfectly acceptable, and seemingly desirable, for a person to desire the task of being a church leader serving as an elder/overseer.

Lest the participants think the researcher was implying that parity in the context of plurality prohibits an elder receiving wages from the church, as is the stance of some traditions, the researcher read 1Timothy 5:1-18 with an emphasis on verses 17-18: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”” The researcher noted that the distinction here was not some elders ruling and some elders teaching, as some traditions perceive. However, the distinction was payment, per the context of wages, and those whose labor was in preaching and teaching. In other words, some elders had their role such that it was their employment. In the context of Providence Church, that would be the one designated as pastor.

The researcher had the participants turn to 1 Corinthians 9 next. They read the context of verses 3-12, but emphasized verse 9, where Paul once again quotes Deuteronomy 25:4, when he asks a rhetorical question: For it is written in the Law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.’ Is it for oxen that God is concerned?” Paul’s point, it was noted, was that it is reasonable for those whose labor is in shepherding the flock to be supported financially in doing so. In other words, these passages were used to validate not only employing an elder or elders, but the benefits in doing so. The elders noted the blessing it had been for Providence Church to have the ability to employ an elder during the entirety of its existence. However, the researcher noted that, in designating the vocational elder as “the pastor,” it could well be inferred that the other elders are not pastors, even though they are also called to
shepherd/pastor the flock. The researcher explained, “Practically speaking, the two categories of elder can be seen as having different roles. The intention was to note a different proportion of the care of the flock falling upon the one with the greatest opportunity to do so, that is, the employed elder, or pastor, since he had been freed from other pursuits by financial support from the church.” It was speculated that the elder parity, instead, could become minimized if the employed elder performs the vast majority of the public teaching so that he could be seen as being different categorically. A discussion ensued where it was noted that it would be wise to regularly communicate the plurality and parity among the elders, perhaps even using this material in the adult Sunday school class.

This raised the question about the preferred nomenclature. Should all of the elders be called pastors? Should the term pastor be eliminated? Given that many come from various backgrounds prior to joining Providence Church, it was noted that terms like elder and pastor can already have meaning for many and they may not envision what is intended at Providence Church. The researcher explained that over the past few years he had only been referring to himself in church discussion as an elder, though in contexts outside of the church he had used the term pastor, as it communicates vocation in addition to role within the congregation. There was discussion about the best way to communicate the following to the congregation regarding the employed so-called pastor and the other elders, that the difference was in the workload, not so much a difference in the nature of the work. The goal was to explain that employment was involved to free up some, or at least one, to have more time dedicated to the work of the ministry. Similar to how the seven in Acts 6 freed up some to focus on the ministry of the word and prayer, so should the congregation free up an elder even more so in that regard. John MacArthur was cited to help clarify: “Not all elders will have the same burden of preaching and
Some may teach or preach infrequently, some constantly. Those whose ministry demands all their attention should be freed from any need to earn a living and be cared for and even rewarded for their singular devotion.”

The question was asked, “How should we communicate plurality and parity?” The elders need to be solidified in their own minds and then communicate that to the flock. Training such as the one employed in this research would also need to be used to educate future and/or potential elders regarding the biblical concepts regarding elder plurality and parity. It was noted that the elders have, over the years, tried to communicate elder plurality and parity in non-verbal ways (e.g., other elders baptizing, other elders officiating the Lord’s Supper, and encouraging our elders to preach on Sunday morning). Having the website list the elders in the same manner on the website, with an individual photo and some biographical information, helped communicate verbally the concepts of plurality and parity. Similarly, it was noted that having each elder wearing a nametag with the title of elder contributes to congregational understanding as well. The researcher explained that the prospective members class explains the church’s polity to help those interested in membership, especially from rather different faith traditions, understand the distinction between elders and deacons and the role of the elders, among other things. The researcher reminded the participants of another quote from John MacArthur, reading from the handout: “That the titles elder, pastor, and overseer all describe the same person is made clear by the use of all three words to describe the same person in Acts 20:17, 28. The term ‘pastor’ emphasizes their shepherding or feeding function, ‘overseer’ their authority and leading function, and ‘elder’ their spiritual maturity.”

198 MacArthur, 1 Timothy, 220.

199 Ibid., 218.
The researcher brought the session to a close by reading the following, also straight from the handout:

When a church has a plurality of leadership with a distinction between paid and unpaid leaders, vocational and non-vocational elders, for example, the roles can be seen to be delineated between those who do the ministry and those who give advice and/or make decisions respectively. In other words, the role of the vocational elder(s) becomes distinct from the non-vocational elders, who may be seen as more of a decision-making board than those who also shepherd the flock. Though the church might not state it this way, the church can, practically speaking, have two different categories of elders, teaching elders as opposed to ruling elders.

The researcher noted that, although Presbyterian groups, for example, will often have hardline distinctions between categories of elders (e.g., teaching versus ruling versus shepherding), it is argued that not only is a plurality of elders the most biblically faithful approach for Baptist churches, but also that the parity among elders without categorical distinctions is most in accord with Scripture. There may be different emphases due to giftedness, experience, and/or training, but distinctions are among equals who share the burden of shepherding the flock and some may be able to carry more of the load due to being free from other vocational pursuits. In other words, while it may prove practical to articulate that some elders are primarily concerned with certain areas of service, that does not relegate them to such only, nor does that make them categorically different or different authoritatively.

Teaching Session Four: Shepherding through Teaching

The last session again occurred within the context of a monthly-scheduled elders meeting, with the teaching being the first item on the agenda. The meeting began on December 4, 2020, at 11:45AM, in the same children’s Sunday school room in the Providence Church building. The researcher distributed to each participant a copy of the meeting’s agenda and the
The researcher’s notes differed by having commentary in red, but that commentary has been changed to italics in the appendices.

The session began with a review of the main contentions of the previous three sessions. The researcher read from the handout noting that, “The authoritative role of the elder in the life of God’s covenant people is established in the Old Covenant community, but later refined and defined as the highest human authority within a particular congregation.” He reminded the participants that in the New Covenant communities (i.e., the individual congregations) the elders collectively bore the responsibility and authority. From session two, the researcher reminded the participants that the terms elders and overseers refer to the same group of people, whose task it is to collectively shepherd/pastor the flock. He noted that there was no fundamental difference based on having a seminary degree or being employed by the church. Reviewing session three, the researcher explained that the New Testament describes and prescribes a plurality and parity of elders, whereby those paid are expected to do more of the work, not different work. Again, it was emphasized that the expectation was a different workload, not different work.

The researcher explained that this final session would be about the importance of teaching in elders fulfilling the task to shepherd the flock. The participants were reminded that the key requirement for elders, as opposed to deacons, is ability to teach, as was stated in 1 Tim 3:2 and Titus 1:9. The researcher noted that the requirement was ability to teach, not the ability to preach, a distinction which would be taken up later in the session. Acts 6 was referenced, wherein the apostles seemingly established a pattern where the deacons of a congregation labor

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200 Appendix L
201 Appendix M
to free up the elders to focus on the ministry of the word and prayer. This primacy of teaching was highly regarded, as the researcher explained that, “Teaching is not the only way in which elders shepherd the flock, but it is primary.” For corroboration, the researcher shared the following quote from John MacArthur: “To preach and teach God’s Word is the primary task of elders (1 Tim 4:6, 11, 16; 5:17; 2 Tim 2:15, 24; Titus 2:1).” The emphasis of the researcher was for the participants to remember that in their role as shepherds, a key means of fulfilling their role is via teaching.

The researcher quoted the handout as he asked the question, “What is the difference between teaching (διδάσκω) and preaching (κηρύσσω)?” The researcher noted the following popular sentiments that might serve as answers among churchgoers:

- “Preaching is to the heart. Teaching is to the head.”
- “You teach to inform. You preach to persuade.”
- “Teaching entails information. Preaching entails application.”
- “A teacher is reserved. A preacher is loud and probably sweaty.”
- “I know it when I see it.” (clues could be handouts and outlines versus “sharing what’s on his heart”)

The researcher explained that there is much debate as to the difference between teaching and preaching. Some would contend teaching is for edifying the church and preaching is for evangelizing the lost. Others would argue that teaching is the transfer of information only, whilst preaching applies truth with the expectation of response. For some, the difference is in location; behind the pulpit is preaching, but everything else is teaching. For others, preaching is characterized by passion and perhaps even volume or direct imperatives. Some may say they

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202 MacArthur, 1 Timothy, 108.
know it when they see/hear it, though it would be hard to categorically define. Others might see this as a distinction without difference. If teaching ability is necessary for an elder, then teaching is a significant aspect of the job; it was concluded that knowing what is entailed would be beneficial.

The researcher returned to the original question: What is the difference between teaching (διδάσκω) and preaching (κηρύσσω)? He noted that, while some may use the terms as synonyms, the Bible does make a distinction between preaching and teaching, using two different Greek words. For example, there are texts that draw a distinction between the two by at least depicting them as two different activities, even if both occur. To show that teaching and preaching were actually distinct, the following verses from the handout were read aloud to note how the terms are used, particularly in the ESV:

- **Matthew 11:1** ... Jesus ... went to “teach (διδάσκω) and preach (κηρύσσω)” in their cities.
- **Acts 5:42** “Every day, in the temple and from house to house, [the apostles] did not cease teaching (διδάσκω) and preaching (εὐαγγελίζω).”
- **Acts 15:35** But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching (διδάσκω) and preaching (εὐαγγελίζω) the word of the Lord.”

The researcher noted that the latter two examples from Acts, where preaching is the English rendering, it corresponds to the term from whence the concept and terminology of evangelism comes (i.e., εὐαγγελίζω). The prefix and verb entail a good message being given, or giving good news (i.e., the gospel). Thus, preaching here is proclaiming the gospel or evangelizing, a term meaning to give good news, although in Christian contexts it means to give *the* good news, namely, the message about the person and work of Jesus the Christ with regard to
redemption of those who believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of the second member of the trinity. The researcher referenced Paul’s admonition to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5, where Timothy is to do the work of an evangelist (ἐργασίας τοῦ ἐν θάνατος, ἐντάφιασης, καὶ Καθαρισμοῦ τοῦ Σατανᾶ), explaining the same Greek verbiage was employed. In other words, it was noted that part of preaching is evangelism, which is certainly not limited to those ordained and/or employed by a church.

The following texts were read to show not only a distinction between the preaching and teaching, but also to raise the question of context for each. Does location determine whether it is preaching or teaching? Or is it the content of what is said? Or is the distinction determined by who receives the communication? Per Matthew 4:23, “[Jesus] went throughout all Galilee, teaching (διδάσκω) in their synagogues and proclaiming (κηρύσσω) the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.” Likewise, according to Matthew 9:35, “Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching (διδάσκω) in their synagogues and proclaiming (κηρύσσω) the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.” Luke informs the readers that, “Jesus was teaching (διδάσκω) the people in the temple and preaching the gospel (εὐαγγελίζω)” (20:1). It was noted that Paul was “proclaiming (κηρύσσω) the kingdom of God and teaching (διδάσκω) about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance” in Acts 28:31. Paul speaks of the Roman Christians being hypocritical with regard to teaching and preaching: “you then who teach (διδάσκω) others, do you not teach (διδάσκω) yourself? While you preach (κηρύσσω) against stealing, do you steal?” (Rom 2:21). Paul’s admonition to Timothy near the end of his second epistle to him includes both. He commands Timothy to “preach (κηρύσσω) the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (διδαχή)” (2 Tim 4:2).
It was noted that, while one could make a case for some overlap, preaching seemed related to communicating a message, a proclamation, with some predetermined content, like a herald with the message of another. Teaching, however, appeared more akin to a process of educating a person in a subject, moving the learner from one level of knowledge to another. Also, it was noted that teaching was done in synagogues and the temple, though it would be unwise to conclude teaching should only be done within the confines of a religious setting. The researcher tried to ensure that one of the takeaways was that the biblical texts that differentiated preaching from teaching did not isolate preaching to the Sunday morning pulpit and teaching to other, seemingly, less important occasions. In fact, the researcher referred to the so-called “Sermon on the Mount” in Matthew 5-7 to highlight a narrative comment: “And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching (διδαχή), for he was teaching (διδάσκω) them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Matt 7:28-29). Even that which is often regarded as the greatest sermon of all time was referred to as Jesus’ teaching the people, the same activity an elder must be capable of doing, though likely without the same level of astonishment expected. The researcher concluded that the phenomenon commonly thought of as preaching a sermon is not synonymous with preaching as defined or demonstrated in the New Testament. Perhaps a better English word would be “proclaiming,” while what is commonly deemed as a sermon should be regarded as a subset of teaching, not different from it categorically. In other words, preaching a Sunday morning sermon is not different from teaching, but a special kind of preaching, especially expository preaching.

The researcher introduced some practical questions to spark discussion. He asked if the notion that, “A woman may teach, but not preach” had biblical warrant. As a complementarian
congregation, this was an important topic for the elders of Providence Church. It was noted in
discussion that complementarianism is a spectrum and that there are churches which would
identify themselves as such, and yet might have female elders or even females communicating
the Bible to an audience of both men and women. Such might be justified since what they were
doing was called, “sharing” or “teaching,” and not “preaching a sermon.” 1 Timothy 2:12 was
brought up, wherein the Apostle Paul stated, “I do not permit a woman to teach (διδάσκω) or to
exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.” Biblically, the prohibition of that
text deals with teaching, not preaching, regardless of how a congregation might apply it. The
discussion also noted that the Bible never says a woman is unable to teach or preach, as is
sometimes claimed, as though God did not so gift females. However, this text in question deals
with permissibility, not ability. Additionally, it was noted that in Titus older women are actually
expected to teach younger women, though the verb διδάσκω is not actually used; the tenor of the
passage is communication by example and explanation of how the younger women should
live. It was concluded that wherever a church falls in its approach to 1 Timothy 2:12, it would
be untenable to use it to say a woman may teach, but may not preach a sermon on Sunday
morning.

Another practical topic discussed was the popular, especially in Presbyterian circles,
distinction between ruling elders and teaching elders. The commonly used text for justification
was referenced: “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially
those who labor in preaching (λόγος) and teaching (διδασκαλία)” (1 Tim 5:17). It was noted
again that the contrast is not between those who rule and those who do not rule, that is, those
who teach. The distinction was noted to be from among elders who rule well and those among
them who labor in “word” and teaching. All the elders in question were ruling and presumably
teaching, but some did so as their labor, which seems to indicate occupation or vocation. In other words, the distinction is between those who do some teaching and preaching and those who do more teaching and preaching.

Given the situation at Providence Church, the question was asked, “What are the ramifications of an employed elder with regard to shepherding, in general, and preaching/teaching, in particular?” The consensus was that it would be reasonable to expect such an employed elder to do more of the shepherding than the elders not employed by the congregation. However, it was feasible to envision a paid elder who did more shepherding with regard to interpersonal interaction with the congregation and not necessarily having his “extra” time being limited to more teaching. In fact, knowing that teaching, albeit a primary occupation of the elders, is not the exclusive means of shepherding, it was noted that a paid elder/shepherd/pastor who did seemingly as much of the teaching as a non-vocational one, but with much greater time invested in cultivating personal relationships unto discipleships was reasonable. It was noted that teaching, as noted in the Bible, can take various forms with varying degrees of formality, even noting a mentoring relationship could qualify. Teaching is not limited to standing behind a lectern or pulpit in a church building, nor is it less than that.

To flesh out that which had been taught in this session and prior sessions, the question was asked, “Is teaching, in general, for all elders, but preaching, in particular, reserved for the paid clergy?” That was regarded as unsupportable. Instead, if a distinction is to be made, it would seem teaching is what is done in the church by those in charge of the spiritual development of those within the body of Christ, whilst the preaching of the gospel, in the sense of proclamation of said gospel with the intention of conversion, might be more likely to take place outside of the church. Thus, the Sunday morning expository sermon is not exclusively nor
even mostly preaching, as defined by the New Testament. However, a sermon could and perhaps should include the content of the gospel being addressed to unbelievers, calling them to faith in Christ. There is a distinction between the preaching and teaching, but there is nothing in the biblical usage of the terms to indicate one is performed on a Sunday morning by a paid elder whilst the other may be performed by non-vocational elders in other venues.

It was noted, however, that using the terms “pastor” or “teaching elder” could confuse a congregation, particularly when it comes to plurality and parity among the elders. While the elder in question may well be the elder who does the lion’s share of the teaching, he is not exclusively doing so. For those who only attend the Sunday morning service, it may be a more common misperception, since exposure to the teaching of the other elders could be minimal at best. By way of contrast, the congregation could be educated regarding plurality and parity by the elders visibly sharing the workload, even if only occasionally. Seeing a different elder preach a sermon on Sunday morning not only communicates elder plurality, but also parity as he too is qualified to do that which is held in such high regard. It was noted that having the elders take turns officiating the Lord’s Supper, which occurs twice monthly, helps communicate plurality and parity. Striving to have official communications, even when generated by the vocational elder (i.e., the pastor), from the elders or on behalf of the elders would also communicate the plurality and parity. Teaching this material to the adult Sunday school class was suggested.  

Touching again on the primacy of teaching in the role of the elders shepherding the flock, it was noted just how important biblical teaching is to the health of the congregation. The primary worship service must be grounded in the Bible and biblical truth. Not only is that

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203 The elders subsequently decided to have the researcher teach this material over four sessions to the Providence Church of Texas adult Sunday school class beginning February of 2021.
gathering of the assembly mandatory (cf. Heb 10:24-25), it is the time when the greatest portion of the congregation is together. It is also the first impression many will get of the church, so the preaching and teaching during that time should be such that excellence in execution as well as doctrinal fidelity is sought. It was noted that the requirements in 1 Timothy 3 do not require a dynamic speaker who can easily keep an audience enthralled, but honing communication skills is a worthwhile goal. For present and potential elders, education and experience would go a long way, it was noted, to growth. It was also noted that there is always room for improvement and what is often overlooked in comparing vocational and non-vocational elders is the vast gap in experience between the two. For example, the researcher pointed out that he has formally taught in some capacity at least once a week for over twenty years. Practice, it was said, can indeed “make, not perfect, but better.” With concerted efforts to educate and opportunities to gain experience, the benefits to the elders and then to the congregation are exciting to envision.

In the discussion, the researcher asked, with the explicit caveat that he has no intentions of going anywhere else, what the process would/should look like when it is necessary for a church to replace the elder primarily responsible for Sunday morning sermons. What qualities should be sought? In contrast to the formation of a “pulpit committee,” the constitution designates the elders as a search committee. Thus, they need to be able to evaluate sound doctrine and character, which is tough to do over a weekend when a candidate preaches his best sermon and is on his best behavior. The admonition not to lay hands on a man too soon (1 Tim 5:22), whereby a church should not make a man an elder too soon, lest his sin still be lurking.

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204 It was noted in passing that the English word translated as “church,” from the Greek ἐκκλησία, is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as “assembly” (e.g., Acts 19:32, 39). As such, it is another example of a translation difference based on the context of the covenant community. It is a translation choice with the potential for confusion as people have been more and more comfortable “doing church” remotely. The church, or assembly, assembles, however. The congregation congregates.
under the surface (1 Tim 5:24), is particularly important for one who could have such great influence in the life of a church. The idea of having a non-vocational elder become vocational was entertained, as his character and commitment to the congregation would have been more readily observed over time. But, it was determined that any elder, and especially one employed to do much, if not most, of the teaching should have great affection for and knowledge of the Scriptures. He should be in doctrinal conformity with the particulars of the church and in at least general agreement with the founding documents and philosophical convictions.

The researcher closed the session with some summarizing thoughts. He noted elders are collectively responsible to ensure the doctrinal soundness of all instruction, either by doing the teaching themselves or by ensuring any who teach are biblically sound, reminding them again of the surrounding context of Paul’s admonition to the elders of the church at Ephesus, where the danger was doctrinal (Acts 20:28-31). The researcher noted that formal education, like seminary, can certainly be helpful, but it is not a requirement for an elder, even a vocational elder. The researcher endorsed and cited Alexander Strauch’s *Biblical Eldership*, saying that being apt to teach entails three things: “a knowledge of Scripture, the readiness to teach, and the ability to communicate.”

The researcher recalled teaching a preaching class at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, wherein was a student who boisterously shared on the first day that he was “called to preach.” Alas, he was a rather poor communicator. Privately, the researcher tried to address potential misconceptions, explaining that there is no office of preacher, but of elder, who shepherds, a portion of that is giving a sermon. It is the church that calls and affirms, which is sometimes referred to as an “external call.” It is an individual who has a desire to be an

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overseer/elder (1 Tim 3:1). The researcher admitted that, at the time, he had serious concerns about the young man, seeing his poor communication skills as potentially insurmountable. Yet, if he developed spiritual maturity, godly character, and a biblical and theological knowledge en route to an aptitude to teach, then he may have indeed found himself serving as an elder somewhere, whether employed or not. Education and experience could certainly help him, but that his situation was a learning experience for the teacher as well as the student. To qualify, a man need not necessarily be a dynamic speaker. A biblically qualified man with the desire should be considered with the assumption that he can and should grow in not only godliness, but also in his proficiency to shepherd the flock, including teaching.

The researcher noted that an elder may have greater affinity and/or experience in some aspects of shepherding the flock, but each elder is qualified, by virtue of being an elder, for any and all aspects of elder responsibilities, including preaching. Admittedly, experience and employment may well lead to certain elders carrying more of the load in certain areas. In each area, further education and experience would yield greater proficiency (e.g., counseling, prayer, oversight or management, etc.). It was noted that there is a difference between offices and roles. Not all elders will have the same burden of preaching and teaching. From the handout, the researcher shared the following quote from John MacArthur: “Some may teach or preach infrequently, some constantly. Those whose ministry demands all their attention should be freed from any need to earn a living and be cared for and even rewarded for their singular devotion.”

The researcher concluded by arguing that, there is nothing in Scripture to contradict the plurality, nor the parity of elders. They have the same qualifications, the same tasks, and the

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206 MacArthur, 1 Timothy, 220.
same authority. The only biblical distinction made regarding elders is in the potential for the church to remunerate as needed and/or desired (1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Cor 9:6-12). A lifetime of learning would go a long way of helping any, regardless of innate talent or supernatural gifting, as education and experience help benefit the elder(s) and the church, including Providence Church.
Chapter 4

Results

A politician once famously asked, “What difference, at this point, does it make?” That is the overarching question this chapter will attempt to answer. Was the action research beneficial? Did it address the problem? In this instance, how are the elders, and potentially, Providence Church of Texas, changed from this study? It has been noted that, people are “hard to predict and difficult to control.” The goal was not to control the participants or even get them to perform on the test in a prescribed manner, but to facilitate learning from the Scripture regarding better understanding the roles in which they already serve. The data will be examined to see if that did indeed happen.

Data

There were a variety of options with regard to organizing the results, and two were found particularly useful and are shared below. The researcher transcribed the results from the questionnaires and, firstly, organized them according to the question being asked. Secondly, the researcher organized that same information whereby the individual participant and his responses were highlighted, after tagging the respondents as participants Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie.

Organized according to Question

There were four questions on the questionnaire and the participants each filled out the questionnaire twice, before and after the teaching sessions. The participants took the pre and post teaching questionnaires about two and a half months apart, first in September 2020 and then in

207 Stringer, Action Research, 43.
December 2020. To highlight the question and the impact of teaching on each, the data will be presented by noting the question and the responses of each participant in the order the questions appear on the questionnaire, with the column labeling pre and post teaching answers.

**Question One**

1. What are the offices of the church as you understand them?

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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Pre-Test Response</th>
<th>Post-Test Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpha</td>
<td>Elder, deacon</td>
<td>Elder, deacon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bravo</td>
<td>Elders (including the pastor), Deacons</td>
<td>Elders and Deacons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>Elders: Overseers, Shepherds, Pastors, Teacher; Deacons: Duties of ministry involving service of upkeep, serving needs of members, caretaking</td>
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Question Two

2. Define the role of elders throughout the Old and New Testaments, including first century Jewish life.

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<td>Alpha</td>
<td>OT They &quot;sat in the way&quot; and discussed issues of the day. They were called upon to give advice/guidance, settle concerns. N.T. They are a gift to the church to serve as spiritual leaders, especially in prayer for the congregation</td>
<td>O.T. Various offices - priests, prophets; even &quot;elders&quot; -- (which are somewhat undefined) N.T. Elders are to be men of character (godly) who shepherd the congregation in various ways, esp preaching, teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bravo</td>
<td>Elders were always mature men of faith chosen to lead God's people. They had (have) authority from God as under-shepherds. Especially in the NT, their role includes teaching/preaching, prayer and being pastors.</td>
<td>Elders were leaders of the people/congregation. It is assumed that there was a level of maturity that often came through age. N.T. defines the role &amp; qualifications more clearly to be godly leaders of the congregation. But have always been overseers in both OT and NT.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>Elders in the O.T. were the older, more experienced men who were advisors &amp; respected for their knowledge of the Law. Decision makers for the people, due to their supposed experience and wisdom.</td>
<td>O.T. - Elders were among those who led the people by supporting designated leaders, such as Moses. Not much is clarified about elders mentioned in the O.T. N.T. Elders shepherd/lead the flock. Primary decision makers for the local church. Take on the role of teaching (and preaching).</td>
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Question Three

3. How has the role of elder changed since the completion of the New Testament? In other words, as culture and professions have evolved, how has that influenced and necessitated a change in the role of elder?

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<td>Alpha</td>
<td>In some denominations (SBC), elders function more as deacons, handling day to day issues, such as church finance, logistics, etc. I don't think that (according to my understanding of Scripture) there should be an evolution or change to accommodate culture, etc.</td>
<td>I don't think the role has changed. We do as a matter of practicality see more vocational elders who are sponsored by churches to devote themselves full time, but that is not new to scripture.</td>
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<td>Bravo</td>
<td>Unfortunately, the role has been minimized by unbiblical church models. Each individual church is meant to have elders, but Roman Catholics (and others) have usurped this authority with popes, bishops, etc. The role of the elders is clear in Scripture and each church should have elders to lead, preach and teach.</td>
<td>Their role has often evolved into paid pastors and their &quot;volunteer&quot; helpers or committees. But the role was and is intended to be a group of equals (whether paid or unpaid) that focus on the spiritual needs of the church, primarily preaching and teaching. They may have different talents and focuses, but there is parity.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>Paul specifically writes of the qualifications of elders and mentions descriptive names synonymous with elders. Examples: above reproach, husband of one wife, good manager of children &amp; family. The OT does not list these - &quot;Elder&quot; is more of a term that refers to &quot;older&quot; and &quot;wiser&quot; by implication.</td>
<td>The roles of elders in modern times should be the same as designated and described in the New Testament. Changes in culture and professions should not dictate changes in how the Bible dictates the office, function, and role of elders.</td>
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**Question Four**

4. Explain the relationship of these terms as they relate to one another: Elders, overseers, and pastors/shepherds.

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<td>Elders = overseers. Pastors = shepherds. Although there is crossover with elders/overseers, into the other realm in the sense of overseeing, guiding, and shepherding all being related. The pastor is a role/gift in himself who should function similarly to an elder especially in spiritual guidance - although he is typically a pastor/teacher, so his function may have a more formal orientation toward teaching/preaching.</td>
<td>All refer to the same person(s) with respect to the various functions of the office. We think of &quot;elder&quot; as one with spiritual maturity and wisdom, &quot;overseer&quot; as a role of guiding, ruling - like a CEO - Pastors/shepherds have a role of protecting the flock from error, heresy as well as encouraging, motivating, and guiding. There is overlap between these roles - They are not distinct in and of themselves.</td>
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<td>Bravo</td>
<td>Overseers and pastors/shepherds are functions of elders. The pastor should be an elder, but all elders have the job of being pastors. They also have the job of being overseers of God's people that are part of the local church to care for their needs and to protect the spiritual health of the church body.</td>
<td>All describe the same group of people, but are different in their roles that they are to fulfill. Essentially, elders are to be overseers/rulers of the congregation while shepherding/caring for/ministering to the congregation.</td>
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<td>Charlie</td>
<td>Elder: One who has been a Christian for many years, who possesses a good grasp on the Word, and being above reproach (among other things). Overseers: Leaders, counselors, being aware of and responding to the needs of members of the church. Pastors/shepherds: Directing, leading, teaching - helping the flock grow in sanctification.</td>
<td>All are interrelated in the aspect of being the same church office. The qualifications required are established in the Scriptures as mature Christian men above reproach, using wisdom &amp; biblical knowledge to have the charge of keeping the spiritual well being of the church members in order, by teaching and preaching and taking care of overseeing and shepherding the flock.</td>
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It was helpful to examine the data by the participants individually. To this end, the data is presented according to the responses of each elder in order of assigned pseudonym, Alpha, Bravo, and Charlie. The columns labeling pre and post teaching answers remain the same.

### Participant/Elder Alpha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Question</strong></th>
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Reflections

Questionnaire

Question One: “What are the offices of the church as you understand them?”

Before and after the teaching sessions, the participants showed understanding of the general categories of church leadership. Their responses to question one were uniform, although some answers were more nuanced in the initial response (e.g., participant Bravo’s “Elders (including the pastor), Deacons” and participant Charlie’s “Elders: Overseers, Shepherds, Pastors, Teacher; Deacons: Duties of ministry involving service of upkeep, serving needs of members, caretaking”).

In the questionnaire after the teaching sessions, the participants all indicated the offices were elder(s) and deacon(s). It is important to note that their answers did not necessarily improve, although one might argue that participant Charlie was giving function as well as office in the first answer. Rather, their answers were simplified in noting the general offices after the sessions.

Upon reviewing the initial responses, one might wonder if the teaching process would be primarily about instilling new information or rather reinforcing knowledge the participants already possess, but giving them a more solid and biblical foundation for that knowledge. Perhaps the participants know the answer the researcher is soliciting, but after the study, they would more convinced of the biblical warrant for that answer. Perhaps they might also know better the “what” and the “why” and be able to articulate that to others as well, akin to generational discipleship model Paul imparts to Timothy (2 Tim 2:2). After all, elders are expected not only to know, but also expected to help others know.
Question Two: “Define the role of elders throughout the Old and New Testaments, including first century Jewish life.”

After constructing the questionnaire and embarking on preparation for the teaching sessions, the researcher himself was rather surprised by the abundance of references to elders in the Old Testament and in first-century Jewish life. This was the session that he anticipated being the most interesting as this question would begin to address the biblical role of elder throughout the Scripture. This topic should inform their understanding of an elder’s role in a local church, including their own.

The participants indicated an awareness of the fact that elders played a role in the Old Testament and that they played a role in the New Testament as well. Whereas their answers to question one were more simplified in their second attempts at the survey, question two yielded the opposite results. Although the length of their answers was not noticeably different from one to the other, since all of their written answers essentially filled the space allocated on the page, greater detail is noted in their post-test responses.

For example, participant Alpha noted, in the post-test response, the contrast between the role of elder from the Old to the New Testament. In the Old Testament, while an authoritative group, there were also other, more prominent offices, namely, priests and prophets. One might add kings to that list as well. In the New Testament church, however, after the time of the apostles, the church’s sole authoritative office is that of elder. Participant Alpha also made an

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208 More will be said on this topic later in the chapter when reflecting on the questionnaire, but Appendix N is a record of the researcher’s own responses to the questionnaire after the sessions. It is apparent therein that the researcher’s response to question two is significantly longer than his others responses, nearly as long as the responses to the other questions combined (i.e., 171 to 188 words respectively). Perhaps the participants might have said more were they allotted more room on the page to answer.

209 Elders are not the only office prescribed for the church, since deacons have been mentioned as well, even in the questionnaire. However, despite what may take place in some ecclesiastical traditions, the deacon is not
interesting change from his pre-test answer regarding the elders as spiritual leaders, “especially in prayer for the congregation,” to his post-test answer noting that elders “shepherd the congregation in various ways, especially preaching, teaching.” Prayer in the life of the elders is certainly a valid observation based on texts like Acts 6, where there is an emphasis on “prayer and the ministry of the Word,” and James 5:14, where the elders are to be called for prayer. Yet, the priority the New Testament puts on preaching and teaching was a new emphasis, aptly noting the biblical requirements and instructions in that regard.

In his post-test response, participant Bravo captures well the continuity and discontinuity regarding elders from the Old Testament to the New Testament. He noted that, elders have “always been overseers in both OT and NT,” but that the New Testament “defines the role & qualifications more clearly.” Participant Charlie noted in both responses that elders were decision makers, but in his post-test response he indicated that, in the New Testament church, elders are the “primary decision makers.”

Question Three: “How has the role of elder changed since the completion of the New Testament? In other words, as culture and professions have evolved, how has that influenced and necessitated a change in the role of elder?”

In their pre-test responses, both participants Alpha and Bravo noted a divergence from the biblical role of elder and how that role is implemented currently in evangelicalism. Participant Bravo noted that some ecclesiastical traditions have minimized the role by having other authoritative roles over the church elder(s), and they have, thereby, “usurped” the biblically prescribed authority. Participant Alpha noted a similar problem, evident in some churches portrayed as an authoritative role in the New Testament. The Greek word behind that which is translated, or actually transliterated, as deacon, διάκονος, helps one to understand the servant nature of the role.
within Providence Church of Texas’ denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, wherein the “elders function more as deacons, handling day to day issues, such as church finance, logistics, etc.” Participant Bravo went on to note that he did not think that, “there should be an evolution or change to accommodate culture, etc.” (Emphasis in original.)

It has been noted that analysts often act as translators and exegetes, an observation to which the researcher relates, especially in interpreting the responses to this question. Having known the participants well for many years, the researcher is in privileged place to draw forth the fuller meaning of the words shared. The elders have collectively lamented what appears to be a lack of interest in trying to comply with Scripture, especially among churches, where that can give way to pragmatism or something else that is valued over living out the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

That sentiment is articulated well by participant Charlie in his post-test response. He notes that, “The roles of elders in modern times should be the same as designated and described in the New Testament. Changes in culture and professions should not dictate changes in how the Bible dictates the office, function, and the role of the elders.” Participant Bravo notes in his post-test response that even among a plurality of elders, the role can be “paid pastors and their ‘volunteer’ helpers.” In a manner that indicates he could well teach the lesson on elder plurality and parity, participant Bravo explains that the role should be “a group of equals (whether paid or unpaid) . . . . They may have different talents and focus, but there is parity.” Participant Bravo also notes in his post-test response the priority of “preaching and teaching” for the elders.

It is worth dwelling on the important observation that participants used seemingly new verbiage in the post-test answers. For example, participant Alpha mentioned “vocational elders”

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as a distinction, as opposed to seeing them as pastors, in contrast to elders. Participant Bravo also mentioned pay, noting that, whether paid or unpaid, the elders are equals; there is “parity.” As these were concepts and terms emphasized in the sessions, seeing not only the concepts, but the preferred nomenclature in the post-test lends credibility to the effectiveness of the sessions.

**Question Four:** “Explain the relationship of these terms as they related to one another: Elders, overseers, and pastors/shepherd.”

This is perhaps where the most impact was observed, meaning the biggest change from the pre-test to the post-test. It is also the concept most necessary to move the elders, and potential elders, to better understand their role with regard to teaching and preaching. That is, understanding the plurality and parity among elders, regardless of employment status, was really the culmination of teaching sessions one, two, and three. The elders already served in plurality in a church they deemed biblical, but would parity be as clear? The fact that they recognized only two categories of church office, elders and deacons, in responding to question one, was a positive indicator, but not conclusive. That was understood before this action research.

In his pre-test response, participant Alpha bifurcated elders from pastors, by noting that “Elders = overseers. Pastors = shepherds.” In his post-test response, he noted that the terms, “All refer to the same person(s) with respect to the various functions of the office.” Similarly, participant Charlie, in his post-test response, noted that, “All are interrelated in the aspect of being the same church office.” Previously, in his pre-test response, he had essentially given three different descriptions of three different individuals, namely, elders, overseers, and pastors/shepherds. “Leading” was common to both overseers and pastors/shepherds, but of the three, he only had teaching listed for the pastor/teachers. Participant Alpha had previously
articulated, in his pre-test response, uniqueness for the pastor, as a “role/gift in himself.” He noted the pastor’s function “may have a more formal orientation toward teaching/preaching.” This may indicate the potentiality for seeing the employed elder, labeled the pastor in the Providence Church of Texas constitution, as categorically different such that his role is different. If the church only implies an employed elder in using the term pastor, the researcher’s suspicion that others infer differently is confirmed. That is a reflection, of course, on the researcher as well as the practice of the church since its inception in 2006.

Participant Bravo, in his pre-test response, articulated well what they all seemed to understand, that is, the role elders play in “the spiritual health of the church body.” His responses showed the least amount of divergence, as his pre-test response noted that, “Overseers and pastor/shepherds are functions of elders.” Similarly, in his post-test response, he noted the relationship of the terms as all describing “the same group of people,” but label different roles they are to fulfill. In a nice summary statement, Participant Bravo said that, “Essentially, elders are to be overseers/rulers of the congregation while shepherding/caring for/ministering to the congregation.” The solid responses from all three participants, at least in the eyes of the researcher, contributed to an assessment of success of the action research. Their responses show that they now see the equivalence of terms and recognize parity among the elders, regardless of employ.

Teaching Sessions

Although the primary evaluation tool was the questionnaire, the researcher formulated thoughts during each session regarding the success of instruction. If the researcher teaches, does that ensure learning has taken place? The nice thing about teaching in a smaller, interactive
setting is the capacity for immediate feedback to the instructor. This enables the teacher to linger, if necessary, move along when the perception of understanding has been attained, and to modify methodology in the midst of instruction. A few comments from each session are shared below to communicate the researcher’s perception, admittedly a subjective perception. Whereas Chapter 3 recorded that which happened in the sessions, the following attempts to draw insights from the researcher’s observations (i.e., the informal feedback) in each of them.

**Session One: Elders as Leaders**

As has been mentioned, this teaching session took place within the context of an elders meeting, with the researcher essentially sharing a lesson on elders as leaders. Contrary to what might usually happen in the context of sharing in a meeting, this formality seemed to change the dynamic somewhat. Whereas an elder might share something for five to ten or even fifteen minutes, with anything more being an outlier, this would be much longer. Yet, even before the instruction began, the questionnaire was distributed, filled out in silence, and turned back in to the researcher. A far different mood, for lack of a better term, permeated the room. It felt more academic. Prior sharing or lessons from an elder had a far different ratio of lecture time to discussion time. This session would entail the researcher dominating the time, albeit unintentionally.

It would not be difficult to convince those who were currently leading the church as elders that the Bible described elders as leaders. However, new to the researcher, and potentially to the participants, would be the prevalence of the term in the life of Israel in the Old Testament. The elders’ role as listeners, as opposed to conversation partners, a description of prior meetings,
made it challenging for the researcher to gauge interest and understanding. Much of the first twenty minutes or so was the researcher walking them through the handout.

Before moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament, the researcher asked if there were any questions. It was at that point, that the participants offered helpful feedback, including how interesting it was that elders were so prominently mentioned. The fact that those in the room were somewhat surprised by this was surprising. Including the researcher, these were men well acquainted with the Old Testament, with the researcher having preached through the book of Exodus on Sunday mornings, concluding in 2019. But, unless one is really looking for something, it was noted, it can be easy to miss it.

After a quiet start, the session was fruitful in its aim to show the continuity of the importance of the role of elders in the life of God’s covenant people, moving from those of the Mosaic Covenant, to first-century Jewish life, to the early church, and ultimately to Providence Church of Texas in the present. The feedback received through nonverbal cues, as well as that which was said, helped the researcher gauge the effectiveness of the session and make notes of some modifications for the following session. In other words, using the session as an assessment tool, albeit more subjective, was productive and confirming.

Session Two: Elders = Overseers = Shepherds/Pastors

The researcher was curious to know how well the idea that the terms elders, overseers, and pastors referred to the same group would be received. To receive more timely feedback than the questionnaire in a few months, the researcher was sure to communicate at the beginning that the participants were welcome to comment along the way and/or ask questions whenever they so desired. Since one of the elders had taught 1 Timothy in the adult Sunday school class in recent
memory, the qualifications for an overseer and the equivalence of overseer to elder was accepted without incident. It was interesting to note the feedback of seeing different ecclesiastical traditions attached to the Greek terms, πρεσβύτερος (elder) with Presbyterianism and ἐπίσκοπος (overseer) with Episcopalianism and the Episcopalian form of church government.

The researcher was able to determine receptivity by body language and participation as the lesson turned to the term shepherd. They found it interesting and informative that whenever shepherd was used as a noun it was to either literal shepherds tending flocks or Jesus, the good shepherd, with the exception of the one time in Ephesians 4:11, which was not translated as “pastor” in the ESV. They noted the biblical emphasis is on shepherding as a verb, being that which the church leaders are supposed to do. From looking at Acts 20:17, 28 and 1 Peter 5:1-2 in more detail, their verbal and nonverbal feedback gave every indication that they were firmly convinced of the biblical truth that elders and overseers and shepherds referred to the same people. Their positivity to the material was solidified when it was suggested that the researcher consider teaching this material as a series to the adult Sunday school or during Sunday night Bible study.

Session Three: Elders: Plurality and Parity

The session seemed “more dry” at the start as the researcher addressed the historical validity of the plurality of elders. As this was the first Southern Baptist Church of which the participants had been members, they were not aware of just how prevalent a plurality once was, though they knew it to be the minority report presently. The review of the biblical texts helped solidify the conviction that Providence Church of Texas was on the right track. One of the
participants aptly noted, however, that regardless of history, our ultimate allegiance is to the Scriptures. “Sola Scriptura,” or Scripture alone, should be our authority in these matters.

Where the researcher thought there might be room for learning was in the realm of elder parity. Stringer notes that, “In action research, the major attribute is the extent to which a group or individual is affected by or has an effect on the problem or issue of interest.”

The researcher got the impression from body language that it was initially perceived as odd to exegete the church constitution. However, examining it in light of the biblical truths and how they could illuminate church policy and practices would prove helpful.

This session was more conversational and the researcher was able to confirm their collective understanding that, without elaboration, and with prior baggage, some could interpret our constitution as seeing the pastor as being in a separate category than the other elders. At stake was a perception of parity. Prior to the session, the researcher got the impression that parity was not something that had been given much thought. It was noted, however, by a participant, that it would be helpful for potential elders to understand what was expected. He noted that an elder candidate should not expect to just sit on a board and make decisions from time to time. In describing ways that the church, and the elders, in particular, could better communicate plurality and parity, the researcher was further assured that the material had been grasped, even to the point of being acted upon.

Session Four: Shepherding through Teaching

Although the elders of Providence Church of Texas were not always seen as having parity within the plurality, to the extent that it was an important point to labor, the researcher was

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211 Stringer, Action Researcher, 77.
most anticipating the fourth and last session. Not only was it the culmination of the action research teaching element, it would highlight a distinction that had been cloudy in the researcher’s own mind for years, namely, the distinction between preaching and teaching. Does the leadership see preaching as something reserved for the ordained clergy and teaching as something that virtually anyone can/may do?

Walking the participants through the primacy of teaching met with verbal and nonverbal affirmation. When the discussion turned to the difference between teaching and preaching, the researcher had to make it clear that he was not asking a rhetorical question. After a collective acknowledgement that a working distinction did not readily come to mind, the participants eagerly followed the researcher through the biblical texts using both the terms preaching and teaching to demonstrate at least some distinction is to be made.

The discussions that were had while working through the handout confirmed that they understood preaching a sermon, on Sunday morning, for example, was a distinctive type of teaching, not something contrary to preaching. Further understanding was demonstrated when articulating the importance of communicating plurality and parity via having even the non-vocational elders preaching on Sunday mornings with some regularity. The researcher suggested that each of the elders plan on preaching a Sunday morning sermon at least once per year, to which there was agreement.

Further showing a grasp of the importance of teaching for an elder, one of the participants reminded those in attendance of the importance of giving potential elders opportunities to teach. It was discussed how one could be moved from lower pressure venues to that which seemingly brought the most pressure, the Sunday morning sermon. Another participant noted the benefit of teaching Sunday school, as it was in some ways more challenging, as one did not have to plan for
the potentially derailing and/or unexpected questions or comments during a sermon. Participant feedback validated the importance of teaching in the collective shepherding of the flock in that standards should be high for all teaching at the church, from the children’s classes through the Sunday morning sermon, whereby the teacher in any venue must put in the time to teach well. These discussions prior to the distribution of the post-test questionnaire gave the researcher optimism that the action research had indeed been beneficial.

Hawthorne Effect

The researcher had taught the participants from the Bible in the context of an elders meeting many times over the years, but this process felt odd at times. The formality of recruitment forms, signed consent forms, and the questionnaires created a different mood for the sessions. As Sensing notes, subjects knowing that they are being studied can have impact on the study itself.²¹² Although the details of the original study, which gave rise to the Hawthorne Effect theory, have been called into question, people knowing that they are being observed can have an impact in many scenarios. In this instance, the participants were not, in the researcher’s mind, overly concerned with helping the researcher get a good grade, though it is assumed they part of their willingness to participate was to help the researcher complete his studies.

Yet, knowing the details of this study, including its title and the content of each session beforehand, as was required for the consent form, may well have communicated ahead of time what participants were supposed to know or learn. For example, could knowing ahead of time, from the consent form,²¹³ that one of the sessions would be about “The equivalence of those

²¹² Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 81.

²¹³ Appendix C
labeled as elders, overseers, and shepherds/pastors” influence a participant’s response to the questionnaire that is administered before the education process, particularly the items asking participants to, “Explain the relationship of these terms as they relate to one another: Elders, overseers, and pastors/shepherds”? Likewise, could knowing that the third session would teach the “plurality and parity of elders” ahead of time influence responses on the initial questionnaire? One could argue that the teaching began before it actually began in the sessions.

From a research standpoint, those are valid and important questions to ask. For the researcher, whose primary goal was to develop an effective process to educate elders, and potential elders, to a more complete biblical understanding of their role, those questions are interesting, but ancillary. Perhaps the impact of the action research would not be as obvious when comparing the first and second administrations of the questionnaire, due to what could be seen as “teaching to the test” before that first questionnaire, but the most important data would be the final questionnaire responses. Do the elders have a firm grasp of those things taught in the sessions, that is, those things taught in the Bible, regarding their collective role as elders? If the answer is in the affirmative, then the action research has not only addressed the original problem, but offered a solution to that problem as well.

Assessments

The researcher is compelled to ask how effective the evaluation tools were for this study. The questionnaire will be evaluated in and of itself, but the researcher will also discuss using a questionnaire for assessing similar action research. The teaching sessions themselves were not originally intended as a means of assessment of the action research, but they proved to be helpful in that regard.
Questionnaire

Using a questionnaire, while not offering the appearance of quantitative analysis and being more subjective in evaluation, was an effective choice for this study. One could use a Likert scale survey or even a multiple choice test to gauge the percentage of so-called correct answers, but this study was focused more on understanding and articulating actionable concepts. A researcher might find it more validating and/or rewarding to see participant scores go from a mean of 70% to a mean of 95%, for example, but when dealing with church leaders and the nuances of understanding roles and expectations, an open-ended option better helped this researcher analyze areas to address, in this study and beyond. That does not mean, however, that this questionnaire could not be improved.

The researcher took it upon himself to fill out the questionnaire at the conclusion of the action research. In other words, he took the post-teaching questionnaire. In retrospect, it might have been interesting for the researcher to have personally filled out the questionnaire before and after the teaching, to see how his understanding might have been impacted through teaching and through the interactions with the other participants. The researcher took approximately nineteen minutes to complete the questionnaire and his answers, especially for questions three and four, were significantly longer than those of the participants. The researcher, however, did not answer the questions on the printed page, as did the participants. Instead, the researcher answered in a notebook without the spatial constraints of the printed questionnaire.

From that exercise, the researcher concluded that administering the questionnaire in such a way that the answer spaces were not so limited would be helpful in encouraging further

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214 Appendix N
elaboration by participants. To put it another way, more space to answer on the page could facilitate longer, more thorough responses. Some respondents could be inclined to fill the white space on the page and no more. It could be seen as akin to being interviewed and starting a sixty seconds countdown after asking a question. In fact, many learn to take short answer tests that way, by formulating an answer to fill in the blank, assuming the evaluator wants an answer that conforms to that space. An online questionnaire, whereby one could click from page to page for the different questions would at least not discourage a respondent from a lengthy answer. In the case of the questionnaire administered in this study, even putting questions three and four on the back would afford more room to answer and perhaps even encourage longer answers. That is, of course, one of the benefits of an open-ended form of assessment, like a questionnaire.

One might argue, regarding the content of the questionnaire, that question one was unnecessary for a group already serving as elders, acting in plurality. For another group of participants, this question could be more enlightening. Yet, since the study was envisioned to address the problem of a lack of a formal education process for elders and since there was limited firsthand experience among the elders of ever having served in church leadership as an elder, other than at Providence Church of Texas, it would have been unwise to assume too much. In addition, the study was also designed for those who would be interested in the eldership in the future, so experience as an elder could be potentially non-existent for those individuals and related education could be minimal as well. As a diagnostic tool, it is helpful for an educator to know where students are in order to know where they need to go and how they can be best moved there.

The researcher wonders whether or not the second question contained too much leading information. It was hoped that the participants would recognize elders throughout the Old
Covenant, in first-century Jewish life, and then in the early church. From there, differences and similarities could be noted. However, if the question had just asked participants to “Describe the role of elders in the Bible,” might there have been a greater contrast between the first and second questionnaires? It is realistic to think that pre-test answers might have focused solely on the New Testament teaching regarding the elders of the early churches. Since the instruction for the first session addressed the biblical material across the Mosaic and the New Covenants, it could have brought to mind concepts forgotten, like the role of elders in the Old Testament. Of course, it was not the intention of the researcher to trick the participants into getting them to only think in terms of the New Testament or to try to amplify the impact of the teaching as noted in the questionnaire answers. That is an option that one might want to consider, if using a similar questionnaire for future studies.

The researcher would not recommend eliminating any of the four questions. One wonders, however, about other questions that could be used. Given the feedback acquired during the teaching sessions, one or both of these questions, or similar questions, could be asked:

- What is the relationship between vocational and non-vocational elders?
- What are the requirements to be an elder? To be a pastor? To be a non-vocational elder? To be a vocational elder?

These could highlight the participants’ understanding of elder parity within elder plurality, or lack thereof.

Teaching Sessions

The teaching sessions each took place in the context of a regularly scheduled elders meeting. As a means of facilitating instruction, and gauging feedback on its effectiveness,
having the luxury in 2020 of being able to meet face to face, as opposed to virtual meetings, was not unappreciated. Perception of body language and vocal tone would be more challenging via virtual meetings, in addition to the potential for connectivity issues. Ease of interruption to question or comment would have been stifled as well. The context of a face-to-face elders meeting helped cement the reality of the researcher is actually also a “co-participant,” bearing the responsibility to acknowledge biases, agendas, and the dignity of the participants.215 The researcher as co-participant should, however, “Help the people to analyze their situation,” so that they may “change what they do not like.”216 As such, it was affirming to hear the participants’ feedback in the sessions be such that they too saw areas where Providence Church of Texas could better conform to the descriptive and prescriptive aspects of elders in church life.

Although there were benefits to having the sessions as part of the already scheduled elders meeting, like higher probability of having all the participants in attendance, there were drawbacks as well. The elders meetings have historically been held during the so-called workday and last approximately 90 minutes. There were times when the researcher got the impression that conversation might have gone longer and further had there not been the perception of a time limit. After the teaching session, the elders would still have items on the agenda and, being non-vocational elders, have other jobs to which they would need to return. In the future, with those aspiring to the eldership, for example, having a separate time set aside, perhaps in an evening, where two hours can be reserved, might prove more effective in yielding discussion and immediate feedback of learning. Given the nature of the adult Sunday school class at Providence Church of Texas, the researcher will not be limited to getting through all of

215 Sensing, Qualitative Research, 41.

216 Stringer, Action Research, 20.
session one, for example, in one week. That might be ideal, to have each lesson self-contained during one week of Sunday school, but should each session require two weeks to impart the biblical truths unto achieving the learning objectives for each, there would be no negative repercussions, beyond attendees who miss a week not receiving the full impact of instruction.

Epilogue

Although the aforementioned methods of assessment revealed changes that had taken place in the level of knowledge of the subjects, that is, the elders of Providence Church, one is inclined to note that correlation should not imply causation. In other words, in all humility, the researcher must note that over the course of multiple months the elders could have been exposed to other means of information. It would be a gross overstatement to assume that the only explanation for the elders’ greater understanding of the role of the elder in the life of a congregation was the impact of this action research.

While it would seem reasonable to assume this study has impacted them, one cannot necessarily conclude that the action research caused the change, being the sole cause or even the primary cause. It is possible that embarking on the study motivated the participants to personal study in other sources (e.g., books, podcasts, sermons, etc.) and/or drove them to commentaries on their own to delve more deeply into the biblical texts referenced in the sessions. Perhaps an evaluation tool to isolate the impact of the sessions could prove useful to ensure greater confidence in the efficacy of the teaching sessions.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

It has been stated that, “In action research, the major attribute is the extent to which a group or individual is affected by or has an effect on the problem or issue of interest.”\(^{217}\) The benefits to the researcher, the participants, and to the organization, in its present and future manifestations, are not wholly unexpected, but they are much appreciated. The researcher, in particular, recognizes the superiority in that regard of pursuing a doctor of ministry degree, as opposed to other terminal degree options. This conclusion will attempt to summarize the benefits to Providence Church of Texas, where the researcher is employed, and how the process can be improved to help that church and other churches desiring to improve conformity to the dictates of Scripture, at least where church government is concerned.

Overview

During the research and writing of the elements of Chapter 2, namely, the literature review, the theological foundations, and the theoretical foundations, the researcher was struck by a great contrast. The term almost exclusively used in the New Testament to speak of church leadership was elders, with a few instances of overseers, although those terms refer to the same individuals. Absent in the New Testament was terminology much more prevalent in churches, as one might note on a church’s website. One would be hard-pressed to find in the New Testament an associate pastor of media arts, a women’s pastor, a youth pastor, or even a senior pastor. Further, there are no instances of directors, coordinators, or ministers of various areas of specialization.

That observation is not shared to negate the validity of such labels or roles, but it is noteworthy that many would see nothing odd with a church having any of those, but a church having multiple elders could be seen as novel, weird, or even exclusively Presbyterian. Similarly, a church might scoff at arguments in favor of a solo deacon for a congregation, but see a church with a solo elder/pastor as normal and preferable. On topics where Scripture is silent, Christians might do well to be also silent, but is that the case with church polity? Is Scripture silent?

Assuming the Scripture is sufficient for organizing a church, at least in general terms, seeking to have a church led by a group of elders would appear a reasonable, noble, and perhaps even a necessary task. Far from being unclear, the perspicuity of Scripture on the topic of the plurality and parity of elders governing the church is obvious. To miss that would be an unhealthy bias with potential animosity toward the notion of Sola Scripture, with Scripture alone serving as the church’s ultimate authority, in deference to tradition, culture, pragmatism, and/or preference. Churches, in particular, that claim to have “no creed, but the Bible,” could benefit greatly from this study and its impact.

For a church already governed by a plurality of elders, a better understanding of who they are to be and what they are to do would prove beneficial. For those hostile to such governance, one would challenge those affirming the authority of Scripture to at least examine the biblical references used in the teaching sessions. Scripture is necessary for God’s people to understand many things about Him, including justification and sanctification. Of course, the church is a major proponent of an individual’s sanctification, so a structure in place to effectively shepherd the flock according the to necessary dictates of Scripture should not be quickly nor easily dismissed.
Providence Church of Texas

Action research is designed for “solving specific problems within a program, organization, or community.”218 Providence Church of Texas had a problem. It lacked a formal elder training process for those currently serving as elders or for potential elders. This study was undertaken to address that problem; that problem no longer exists. Providence Church of Texas now has a formal elder training process. To that extent alone, the action research is considered a success. This chapter, however, will attempt to assess the applicability of that process for that church and for other churches. Can it be improved? If so, how? Can it be adapted to other contexts? If so, how?

The project facilitator ascribes to Scripture not only inerrancy and infallibility, but also the notion of Sola Scriptura, where Scripture alone is one’s ruling authority. Perhaps more importantly, Providence of Church affirms Scripture’s inerrancy and infallibility in its doctrinal statement.219 It also affirms “The Cambridge Declaration” (1996), which articulates the so-called “5 Solas of the Reformation,” including Sola Scriptura,220 whereby the church recognizes its need to submit to Scripture’s authority. With a presupposition of a common authority, the

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219 “The Scriptures were given by inspiration of God, and are the only sufficient, certain and authoritative rule of all saving knowledge, faith and obedience. The Bible’s 39 Old Testament books and the 27 New Testament books are regarded as inerrant and infallible in their respective Hebrew and Greek original manuscripts.” Providence Church of Texas’ Statement of Faith, an updated and modified version of “The Abstract of Principles” (1858), the Southern Baptist Convention’s first doctrinal statement. https://providencechurchoftexas.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Appendix1-Statement_of_Faith.pdf

220 “Sola Scriptura: The Erosion of Authority. Scripture alone is the invariant rule of the church's life, but the evangelical church today has separated Scripture from its authoritative function. In practice, the church is guided, far too often, by the culture. Therapeutic technique, marketing strategies, and the beat of the entertainment world often have far more to say about what the church wants, how it functions and what it offers, than does the Word of God.” https://www.alliancenet.org/cambridge-declaration
researcher’s assumption was that if the Bible articulated something different than the thinking or practice of the church, then the church would acquiesce to changing where necessary.

Denouement

In some aspects, it would seem, the elders of Providence Church gained new information. For example, as was anticipated by the researcher, the elders would be quick to affirm the plurality of elders, but the parity of that plurality was a refinement of their understanding. Whereas they might have affirmed a unique calling for a pastor, versus a non-vocational elder, they would now affirm the pastor as one among equals. As opposed to seeing some tasks reserved for the pastor, they would now affirm that any elder would be capable of any task, though some elders may have greater aptitude for some tasks. In addition, with regard to the question of teaching versus preaching, the elders, including the researcher himself, learned that there is a biblical distinction, but that there is a difference between what one might consider preaching a sermon and preaching as the term is used in the New Testament. Elders at Providence Church now are fully aware that if an elder is considered to have met the requirement of being able to teach, that qualifies him for the teaching known as preaching the Sunday morning sermon.

On the other hand, knowledge they already possessed was reinforced. For example, their awareness of the biblical leadership structure of a plurality of elders was solidified by the New Testament’s description and prescription of that model of church government. In addition, they were better equipped to explain and defend that biblical system of governance through the communication of truths with which they already agreed. Whereas they might have recognized the authoritative nature of a church’s elders, seeing the continuity between the testaments and the
elevation alongside the apostles reinforced the gravity of the role in which they serve the Lord and His flock.

Whereas the training sessions were designed with elders and potential elders in mind, the utility of the God-breathed Scriptures is such that the training sessions were beneficial for the congregation as a whole. In seminary, the research heard his professor Howard Hendricks say, “A mist in the pulpit is a fog in the pews.” As such, cloudy thinking among the church leadership, including the role of elders, would lead to cloudy thinking among the congregation. So, clarity in the thinking of the leadership would help clear things up for the congregation. But, there is more benefit to the congregation.

Admittedly, it was not the researcher’s idea to expose the congregation to the sessions, as the idea came from the participants in the sessions, but there was nothing in them that would be unwise to share with the congregation. However, as most communicators know, with a different audience there will likely be differences in emphases, style, or even pace of instruction. Teaching those with a breadth of maturity levels and biblical knowledge may pose a more daunting challenge, but the venue of the adult Sunday school class with its propensity for questions and discussion proved quite conducive to clarification of the elders’ role for that audience.

Thus, the benefit to the congregation in exposure to the material was such that they too would have a better understanding of the role of the elders in their church. What is the practical impact? The congregation would know that they have multiple elders whom they may seek for assistance, not merely the one(s) employed by the church. The congregation would understand that they are shepherded collectively by the elders and yet know that any of them individually
would be able to help them in the execution of their duties for the benefit of the members of the flock.

Next Steps

For the current Providence Church elders and those potential elders, the opportunity for increased experience would be helpful. That is, giving the elders opportunities to preach a Sunday morning sermon, with guidance and feedback would be of great benefit to all involved. However, a few training sessions regarding the nature of expository preaching, sermon construction, and sermon delivery could prove useful in helping those entrusted with the task to be better equipped for it. Assigning and/or suggesting the reading of a preaching manual during those sessions could yield much fruit as well.

Depending on the level of experience of the elder and the prior notice, the other elders could play a role in not only helping him to shape the sermon through the exegetical and homiletical phases, but also in evaluation of the actual sermon delivered. Thus, formalizing two more sessions, one on the nature of expository preaching and some hermeneutical principles and another dealing with the construction and delivery of a sermon will be pursued at Providence Church to complete the training. These two would be taught to the current elders and the six-session elder training program would subsequently be used for potential elders. Since the church’s process for bringing on a new elder entails the announcement of his candidacy at a quarterly members meeting to be voted upon approximately three months later at the following quarterly members meeting, the six sessions of the elder training process could begin after

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221 E.g., Brian Chapell’s Christ-Centered Preaching or Heshael W. York and Bert Decker’s Preaching with Bold Assurance.
announcement of candidacy. That should help any candidate know before the vote at least what is expected of him through the examination of his future role within the church.

Of course, there is nothing to prevent the process from being used prior to announcing a candidate, with the sessions being part of the training and process by which the other elders determine a candidate’s suitability. In fact, some instruction regarding teaching and preaching before evaluating one’s aptness to teach could prove illuminating. Although using the process to train those who already serve as elders was indeed what the researcher did, the researcher would suggest that training one who has just been confirmed by the congregation as an elder would have the least effective impact for the church. It is his hope, however, that never again will there be a time wherein Providence Church of Texas is without an elder training process, even if that process is used to train those who are already serving as elders.

Other Churches

Although every church is different, with different values, history, expectations, and context, there are some inherent commonalities and similarities among churches that enable churches to learn from the research of another. The extent to which a church’s Sitz im Leben mirrors that of Providence Church is the ease with which the research may be applied. For a church with the authority to modify its church government, there should be at least some utility in application of this action research study. Churches without that freedom could find the material enlightening, but rather frustrating. Similarly, a church leader without the capacity to effect change in the church’s government structure could experience frustration, resistance, and even unemployment.

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222 Sensing, Qualitative Research, 215.
Adaptability

The teaching sessions were designed for ease of applicability. Although the teacher’s notes are not a script to be read aloud, the researcher planned the materials with a view that someday the elders of Providence Church could share the teaching load even of the elder training process. That could entail an elder teaching the whole thing or individual sessions taught by different elders. As such, the sessions should be set up well for someone to take a church’s leadership or leadership candidates through the material. For a church that already has a plurality of elders, much of the discussion in the sessions might revolve around the parity of the elders and how they relate to one another, especially vocational and non-vocational elders. Such conversations could bring forth helpful discussions about the plurality and parity with a recognition of the diversity wherewith God has made them overseers. They will likely recognize the complementary nature of their strengths and weakness whereby they collectively cover the proverbial bases of what is necessary to shepherd God’s flock.

The expectation of using these four sessions for a church with a plurality of elders already in place is that the results would be similar as that for Providence Church. That is, some information would be new and potentially challenging while other information would be a reinforcement of that which is already known, with perhaps a greater means of articulation and/or defending. Likewise, teaching such a church’s leaders the material might motivate them to evaluate what they are doing and how they are doing it in light of that which is described and prescribed in the Bible.
Preliminaries

However, for a church without a plurality of elders in place, an instructor may find participants more hostile to some of the concepts taught. In such a scenario, not only would patience be encouraged, but also it may be wise to address the importance of Scripture beforehand. Without a firm conviction to act in conformity with Scripture, modification of structures and/or roles could be quite challenging. Four attributes or characteristics of Scripture come to the forefront of such discussions: Sufficiency, necessity, authority, and perspicuity. One might say that atheists and agnostics reject the necessity of the Bible, deeming it superfluous with regard to life’s big questions. Evangelicals might lament that theological liberals seemingly reject the authority of Scripture. Even though it says one thing, the Bible need not be obeyed in certain areas of life or theology. One might contend that the postmodernist rejects the perspicuity or clarity of Scripture. Can anyone really know the Bible and what it means? Is not that truth just your truth? Would not humility be in order based on language’s so-called undecidability?

Which group, however, is often prone to reject the sufficiency of Scripture? Is it not the evangelicals, those who affirm inerrancy and want their churches to grow and who want to see Christ regarded highly throughout the world? Right motives can at times lead to wrong actions and/or emphases. This can happen in a variety of ways; one of the more obvious for this study would be church structure more in conformity with business principles than biblical principles. Pastors can become akin to CEOs with a board of directors serving merely in an advisory capacity. Pragmatism can creep into a church’s decision-making, since it can be hard to argue with results. Reminding churches and their leaders of the qualities of Scripture can help to solidify their confidence in it to address even the structure of the church government.
Elders and Deacons

For a church interested in a study of church government with the potential for making modifications to the existing structure, spending a teaching session on deacons and their role is also suggested. After all, deacon is a New Testament phenomenon that lacks much specificity. If a church lacks deacons or has deacons serving in a manner lacking conformity to Scripture, then assumptions should not be made that the role is obvious. Such a teaching session would do well to examine the Act 6 passage to see the institution of a group to handle physical needs in order to free up the time of those focused on the ministry of the Word and prayer. The apostles are in view in Acts 6, but the pattern seems consistent, as a singular church would have both elders and deacons, according to Paul’s instructions to Timothy (1 Tim 3).

Teaching/Preaching

Recognizing the permissibility of one not seminary trained to preach a sermon on Sunday morning can be a tall order for some churches, especially if those who are elders or who are to be elders have minimal experience in that regard. Those elders will need education, what that which is compiled in this study, but also experience. They will need opportunities to teach throughout the life of the congregation. A congregation should not be content with a plurality of elders, if those elders will only serve in an advisory capacity and do not see themselves as fully functioning shepherds of the flock. The congregation should be educated in this regard too, so that their expectations are such that they are helping an elder to grow in the area of teaching to the end that he will use that cultivated experience to help them grown in grace.
Those who are trained will often feel more prepared, so getting the elders or potential elders training with regard to teaching and preaching should be prioritized. Some may seem natural in public speaking or other aspects of communication, while others may struggle mightily at first. Recommending helpful preaching and/or teaching books are standard in this realm, but the availability of online courses, some of which are free, are unprecedented. For example, Brian Chapell’s preaching course using *Christ-Centered Preaching* can be used online for free.

**Generalizations**

For a congregation that sees the ordained pastor as “God’s man” to lead the church and fill the pulpit, there can be a stark contrast between the so-called clergy and laity. In such a scenario, it may be challenging for him to seemingly yield and/or share “power” or authority with others. Yet, the benefits to such a leader and to the congregation are hard to articulate, as they are so plentiful, even beyond the value of conformity to Scripture. Shared authority means shared responsibility, mutual encouragement, mutual accountability, and a leadership team capable of filling in the gaps of one another’s weaknesses with the strengths of another.

For a church plant, setting a church government in conformity with Scripture from the beginning would probably be much easier than trying to change that which has been in place for decades, if not longer. There is an old saying that, “You don’t turn a battleship on a dime.” In other words, turning after proverbially going in one direction can be a challenge of great magnitude. There is another phrase that many church leaders interested in making changes have heard over the years: “We’ve never done it that way before.” Having been a part of the formation of Providence Church of Texas, the researcher can confirm that once a church plant
does something, anything, in fact, then “That’s the way we’ve always done it” can become the mantra.

Patience is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23), an aspect of love (1 Cor 13:4), part of the enduring that is expected of the Lord’s servant who is not to be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, “correcting his opponents with gentleness” (2 Tim 2:24-25). For any trying to bring about one of the most significant changes that can happen in a church, its leadership structure, patience and persistence in prayer is encouraged. There are no guarantees, but a resting confidence that Jesus, the Good Shepherd, whose love for the sheep is evidenced by His atoning death for them, cares even more about the success of a congregation than any of His tasked shepherds do, should keep anyone humbly dependent on help from above.

Conclusion

While a young seminary student, the researcher read Richard Baxter’s *The Reformed Pastor*. Contrary to what the title might convey regarding soteriology, the book is about reforming the life and practice of one entrusted with God’s flock. It is essentially an exposition of Acts 20:28, whereby overseers are to (1) keep watch over themselves and (2) the flock. The book was formative for the researcher in personal holiness and approach to serving the flock. However, it would be decades later before the first part of that assignment was fully realized.

The Ephesian elders to whom Paul speaks are to collectively watch one another, meaning that they are not to individually watch themselves, but rather the elders shepherd one another as well as the flock. Having elders who not only work together, but also care for one another is the heart of the relationship where there is plurality and parity. This research project has not only
been educational, but it has been used to help the elders of Providence Church of Texas better know how to keep watch over one another as they collectively shepherd the flock.

Lessons Learned

One of the lessons learned was a lesson that was learned again, namely, that one can read the Bible and perhaps read through it many times over and yet still experience a sense of discovery. The prominence of the role of a collective known as “the elders” in the life of Israel and in the New Testament Jewish life was a stark reminder of things easily missed in the Scriptures. The researcher knew the New Testament taught a plurality of elders, but seeing the aforementioned truths and the elevation by and with the apostles was a discovery worth the effort in the study for his benefit, if nothing else.

A related lesson learned again was just how much one learns in preparing to teach a subject. In the sermon preparation process, one often experiences the problem whereby Sunday morning and a time slot of 30-45 minutes awaits a sermon that on Saturday night is an eight to ten page outline. Much more is learned that is going to be communicated in that sermon, where only the tip of the proverbial iceberg is seen. The process of the literature review and crafting the theological and theoretical frameworks helped the researcher grow far more than is reflected in the material that made its way into the training sessions. There is utility and benefit to the teacher even if the lesson is never taught.

There is risk involved in articulating to the congregation, via the adult Sunday school class in this case, the biblical job description and expectation for those who are to shepherd the flock. They just may come to expect their leaders to not only teach, and teach well, but to do more than teach. They may expect them to emulate the Good Shepherd and to sacrificially care
for the sheep in ways that may not bring notoriety or gratitude and may even result in heartache after investing copious amounts of time and energy into God’s people. There is risk, but the sheep are worth it, primarily because they are His sheep and He is worthy of such dedication.

Epilogue

Providence Church of Texas has one fewer problem than it once did. It now has an elder training process that has proven effective in helping elders better understand their role as elders, even if not vocationally employed as elders. They better understand the nature of the biblically described and prescribed plurality and parity. They better understand the expectations to shepherd the flock, including the primacy of teaching, which includes the capacity to preach a Sunday morning sermon.

It is a process that can immediately be improved and will be improved in the context of the aforementioned church. It is hoped the church will always recognize that it and this process can be and should be Semper Reformanda, “Always Reforming.” It is also a process that can be effective for other congregations. It is the researcher’s hope than any churches that have a plurality of elders will endeavor to conform where needed to the Scripture and may even use this process to that end and to the end of confirming what is already in conformity. For other churches with other government structures, it is hoped that those churches will labor as well to seek to improve to better serve Christ and His church. Perhaps this process can be of benefit to them, even if they refrain from modifying their existing structures.
Bibliography


——. *What is a Healthy Church Member?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008.


Appendix A: IRB Approval

September 25, 2020

Eric Hartman
Philip McClendon


Dear Eric Hartman, Philip McClendon:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office
Appendix B: Permission Letter

August 14, 2020

Rev. Jay Porterfield
Elder
Providence Church of Texas
8000 Miller Road
Rowlett, TX 75088

Dear Rev. Porterfield:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The title of my research project is Shared Oversight: Equipping Elders and the purpose of my research is gauge the effectiveness of an educational process designed to help the elders of Providence Church of Texas serve more effectively.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at the facilities of Providence Church of Texas.

Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Eric “Gunny” Hartman
DMin Student, Liberty University
Appendix C: Consent Form

Consent

Title of the Project: Shared Oversight: Equipping Elders
Principal Investigator: Eric Hartman, graduate student, Liberty University

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invitation to be Part of a Research Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be an elder at Providence Church of Texas. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the study about and why is it being done?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of an educational process designed to equip the elders to more effectively serve the congregation of Providence Church of Texas.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What will happen if you take part in this study?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Fill out a questionnaire. (10 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Attended four teaching sessions. (60 minutes each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Fill out a questionnaire. (10 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sessions are scheduled for the following weeks:</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. 9/27-10/3</td>
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<td>2. 10/11-10/17</td>
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<td>3. 10/25-10/31</td>
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<td>4. 11/8-11/14</td>
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<td>5. 11/22-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 12/6-12/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 1. Questionnaire (pre-test). (10 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2. Teaching Session: The role of elders throughout the Old and New Testaments, including first century Jewish life. (60 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3. Teaching Session: The equivalence of those labeled as elders, overseers, and shepherds/pastors and the significance of those terms. (60 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4. Teaching Session: The plurality and parity of elders. (60 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5. Teaching Session: The ability and expectation of elders with regard to communicating God's Word. (60 minutes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6. Same Questionnaire (post-test). (10 minutes)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How could you or others benefit from this study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The direct benefit participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study is an increase in knowledge of the biblical role of the elder in congregational life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Benefits to society include a better equipped congregation via more effective elders who equip the saints for the work of the ministry including outside the realm of the congregation.
What risks might you experience from being in this study?
The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?
The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of codes. Meetings will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked safe. The data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all paper copies will be shredded.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?
The researcher serves as the pastor at Providence Church of Texas. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, participants are reminded that they are equal as elders at Providence Church of Texas with the pastor though employed by the church, having no special authority over the other elders nor any special rights or privileges thereunto. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study, which is voluntary in nature. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Providence Church of Texas. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?
If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address or phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?
The researcher conducting this study is Eric Hartman. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at 214-477-5047 or Gunny@AggieNetwork.com. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty sponsor, Dr. P. Adam McClendon, at pamcclendon2@liberty.edu.
Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?
If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at jrb@liberty.edu.

Your Consent
By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

________________________________________
Printed Subject Name

________________________________________
Signature & Date
Appendix D: Questionnaire

Date: ____________________

Questionnaire

1. What are the offices of the church as you understand them?

2. Define the role of elders throughout the Old and New Testaments, including first century Jewish life.

3. How has the role of elder changed since the completion of the New Testament? In other words, as culture and professions have evolved, how has that influenced and necessitated a change in the role of elder?

4. Explain the relationship of these terms as they relate to one another: Elders, overseers, and pastors/shepherds.
Session One: Elders as Leaders

One of the terms used in both testaments is that of elder.

In the Old Testament, elders, often referred to as the “elders of Israel,” were at times summoned for insight and/or authority.
Exodus 3:16
Exodus 3:18
Exodus 24
Leviticus 4:15

This Old Testament prominence is also attached to accountability, presumably due to their authority.
Ezekiel 20:3
Joel 1:2
Psalm 107:32
1 Kings 8:1
Deuteronomy 31:9
Deuteronomy 27:1

In the time of the gospels, elders are portrayed as those with some measure of influence and authority within the covenant community and Jewish life in general.
Matthew 15:2
Matthew 16:21
Matt 27:1, 3
Matt 27:20
Luke 7:3
(Acts 4)

The New Covenant community, the church, adopted and adapted the authoritative role of the Jewish elder and outlined specific roles for the new assembly and gave detailed instructions for their selection.*
Acts 11:30
Acts 15
Acts 16:4

*Unlike priests, whose qualifications are detailed in the Old Testament, there are no directives given as to the qualifications of elders prior to those explicitly given by Paul (1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9).
N.B. The importance of the elders linked with the apostles in such important decisions should not be quickly set aside, for one wonders who would hold the authoritative role within the New Covenant community after the apostles are no longer there, leaving behind only their writings and impact. After the apostles, there is no comparable category of leadership.

Rev 4, 5, 7, 11, 14, and 19 note elders around the throne of God, sitting on thrones of their own before God (Rev 11:16).

The pattern established for each New Covenant congregation for sustainability after the passing of the apostles, would be elders in each congregation having the absolute authority under Christ, its head.

Acts 14:23
Acts 11:30
Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 21:18
Phil 1:1
James 5:14
Titus 1:5

CONCLUSION - The authoritative role of the elder in the life of God’s covenant people is established in the Old Covenant community, but later refined and defined as the highest human authority within a particular congregation.
Appendix F: Session One Researcher’s Notes

Session One: Elders as Leaders

One of the terms used in both testaments is that of elder. One the one hand, it simply refers to one advanced in age.

- In the Old Testament, elders, often referred to as the “elders of Israel,” were at times summoned for insight or accountability.

The first reference is in Exodus 3:16, where Moses is told to “gather the elders of Israel” to proclaim to them the good news that God has seen the plight of Israel. The elders of Israel are to accompany Moses to communicate to Pharaoh the message God has for him. (Ex 3:18).

In Exodus 24, seventy of the elders of Israel accompany Moses, Aaron, and two of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, up the mountain to meet with the Lord.

In Leviticus 4:15, the “elders of the congregation” participate in the sin offering by the laying of hands.

- This prominence is also attached to accountability, presumably due to their authority.

For example, Ezekiel 20:3 records the following: “Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD, Is it to inquire of me that you come? As I live, declares the Lord GOD, I will not be inquired of by you.”

It is to the elders that Joel issues his initial words of warning (Joel 1:2).

Joel 1:2 Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?


In 1 Kings 8:1 Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and the heads of the tribes, indicating the significance of the elders, as they were involved in the moving of the ark of the covenant.

After writing the law, in Deuteronomy 31:9, Moses gave it to “the priests, the sons of Levi” … and “to all the elders of Israel.”

The authority of the elders collectively is seen in Deuteronomy 27:1, which reads, “Now Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, ‘Keep the whole commandment that I command you today.’”
In the gospels, the elders are portrayed as those respected with some measure of influence and authority in the community.

Jesus is rebuked in **Matt 15:2** because his disciples broke “the tradition of the elders” by not implementing hand washing before eating.

Beyond the influence one might have due to age, these elders seemed to have an authoritative role as well among the people, as they are seen lumped with chief priests and scribes in conspiring against Jesus, per Jesus Himself, who noted in **Matthew 16:21** that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer at the hands of “the elders and chief priests and scribes.”

It was the “chief priests and the elders who took counsel against Jesus to put him to death.” (**Matt 27:1**). It was the chief priests and the elders to whom betraying Judas returned the thirty pieces of silver. (**Matt 27:3**). Also in Matthew 27, it is the elders, along with other groups, who are Christ’s accusers and mockers, as well as among those who persuaded the crowd to “ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus.” (**Matt 27:20**).

The authority of the elders is even recognized by those outside the community of faith, as **Luke 7:3** records a centurion sending elders of the Jews to solicit the help of Jesus.

**Luke 7:3** When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant.

In **Acts 4** (4:5, 8, 23), it was the “rulers of the people and elders” whom Peter addressed regarding giving an account of the authority Peter had to spread the gospel.

It appears that the New Covenant community, the church, adopted and adapted the authoritative role of the Jewish elder and outlined specific roles for the new assembly and gave detailed instructions for their selection. (*Unlike priests, whose qualifications are detailed in the Old Testament, there are no directives given as to the qualification of elders prior to those explicitly given by Paul in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9.*)

The first reference to elders associated with the New Covenant community is in **Acts 11:30**, where relief is sent “to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.”

In **Acts 15**, the authority of the elders is evident when joined with the apostles to consider the matter of the necessity of circumcision for Gentile converts (15:2, 4, 6). There the elders are also alongside the apostles in choosing those who would join Paul and Barnabas in going to Antioch (15:22, 23).

**Acts 16:4** records the delivery for observance “the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem.”

*The importance of the elders linked with the apostles in such important decisions should not be quickly set aside, for one wonders who would hold the authoritative role within the New*
Covenant community after the apostles are no longer there, leaving behind only their writings and impact.

After the apostles, there is no comparable category of leadership.

It is also interesting to note that the book of revelation mentions elders, twenty-four elders to be precise (Rev 4, 5, 7, 11, 14, and 19), around the throne of God. They in fact, sit of thrones of their own before God (Rev 11:16).

In Acts 14:23 a pattern is established that would become the norm thereafter, the appointing of elders “in every church.” That is, there would be elders (plural) in every church (singular).

Acts 11:30 mentions elders at the church of Antioch.

The elders of the church in Jerusalem are referenced many times. (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 21:18)

The church in Philippi had elders and deacons. (Phil 1:1)

James 5:14 mentions the “elders of the church” and their role in prayer.

The reason Paul left Titus in Crete, so that he might “appoint elders in every town. (Titus 1:5). Since this era had one church per town, it should be evident that he is to appoint a plurality of leadership, elders, for each congregation.

CONCLUSION - The authoritative role of the elder in the life of God’s covenant people is established in the Old Covenant community, but later refined and defined as the highest human authority within a particular congregation.

Questions?
Comments?
Concerns?
Appendix G: Session Two Handout

Session Two: Elders = Overseers = Shepherds/Pastors

ELDER = πρεσβύτερος

OVERSEER = ἐπίσκοπος

Phil 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

1 Timothy 3:1–2 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

Titus 1:7 For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,

1 Peter 2:25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

SHEPHERD/PASTOR = n. ποιμήν, v. ποιμάνω (cf. OT metaphor established in Ezekiel 34 & Psalm 23)

Shepherds as Shepherds:

Luke 2:8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Luke 2:15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

Luke 2:18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

Luke 2:20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

Jesus as (Chief) Shepherd:

Matthew 2:6 “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.'”

Matthew 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew 25:32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.
Matthew 26:31 Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

John 10:2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

John 10:11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10:12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

John 10:14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

John 10:16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Hebrews 13:20 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,

1 Peter 2:25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

1 Peter 5:4 And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Revelation 7:7 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Revelation 12:5 She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne,

Revelation 19:15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

Shepherds of a Church:

John 21:16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Tend (ποιμάνω) my sheep.”

Eph 4:11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,

1 Peter 5:2 shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

Elders, Overseers, and Shepherds are not synonymous terms, but do refer to the same group of people.
• **Elders, in their role as overseers, are to shepherd the flock.**

Acts 20:17 Now from Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the *elders* (πρεσβύτερος) of the *church* to come to him. …

Acts 20:28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock (ποιμήνιον), in which the Holy Spirit has made you *overseers* (ἐπίσκοπος), to care for (ποιμάνω; feed KJV, *shepherd* NASB) the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

• **Elders are to shepherd the flock, overseeing it.**

1 Peter 5:1–2 So I exhort the *elders* (πρεσβύτερος) among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: *shepherd* (ποιμάνω) the flock of God that is among you, *exercising oversight* (ἐπισκόπέω), not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

“That the titles elder, pastor, and overseer all describe the same person is made clear by the use of all three words to describe the same person in Acts 20:17, 28. The term ‘pastor’ emphasizes their shepherding or feeding function, ‘overseer’ their authority and leading function, and ‘elder’ their spiritual maturity.” ~John MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 218
Appendix H: Session Two Researcher’s Notes

Session Two: Elders = Overseers = Shepherds/Pastors

[We are going to see that elders, overseers, and shepherds/pastors refer to the same individuals. But, first let’s be sure we understand that the terms mean in context.]

ELDER = \( \pi \rho \varepsilon \sigma \beta \omicron \upsilon \tau \rho \omicron \varsigma \)

[from which we get the term “Presbyterian” ... We dealt with the terminology of elder in great detail last time, but remember that elders are those entrusted with the ultimate human authority in the churches.]

OVERSEER = \( \varepsilon \pi \iota \sigma \kappa \omicron \omicron \omicron \sigma \) [related to the term “Episcopal”]

Phil 1:1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons:

1 Timothy 3:1–2 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,

Titus 1:7 For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain,

1 Peter 2:25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

SHEPHERD/PASTOR = n. \( \pi \omicron \iota \mu \eta \), v. \( \pi \omicron \iota \mu \alpha \gamma \omicron \omicron \omicron \omega \)

[The noun is translated throughout the New Testament as exclusively as shepherd in the ESV and the verb is typically translated that way also. But, it is not a new concept, but one already established and used to communicate better that to which an elder is called.]

(cf. OT metaphor established in Ezekiel 34 & Psalm 23)

[Turn to Ezekiel 34, so we can see the rebuke God has for those who are poorly shepherding His people, in contrast to how He values His sheep and will one day send a David who will lovingly shepherd the people. This passage not only shows us the Messiah to come, but the nature of His relationship with His people, as Jesus embodies in John 10. It also helps us as elders see what not to do and what to do.]

[Recall Psalm 23:1 ... The LORD, Yahweh, is David’s shepherd, whereby David, and others can have contentment. God has shepherd is an important Old Testament motif to keep in mind when thinking of New Testament shepherding/pastoring.]
Shepherds as Shepherds: [Much as the New Testament has multiple layers with the term elder, whereby it has a general sense and an ecclesiastical sense, so we see that with shepherd. It refers plentifully to literal shepherds who tend to animals.]

Luke 2:8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

Luke 2:15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.”

Luke 2:18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

Luke 2:20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

[In addition to literal shepherds, the New Testament refers often to Jesus as shepherd.]

Jesus as (Chief) Shepherd:

Matthew 2:6 “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

Matthew 9:36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Matthew 25:32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Matthew 26:31 Then Jesus said to them, “You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’

John 10:2 But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

John 10:11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10:12 He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them.

John 10:14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me,

John 10:16 And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Hebrews 13:20 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant,

1 Peter 2:25 For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.
1 Peter 5:4 And when the chief **Shepherd** appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

Revelation 7:7 For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their **shepherd**, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

Revelation 12:5 She gave birth to a male child, one who is to **rule** all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne,

Revelation 19:15 From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will **rule** them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

[Remember that the most common term to refer to a church leader in Baptist life and in much of evangelicalism is pastor, another way of translating ποιμήν, shepherd. Some English translations will use that to help distinguish one who leads the church from one who tends sheep out in a pasture. However, it may be surprising to note how few references there are with this terminology, especially in the noun form. In fact, one will search in vain to find the word “pastor” anywhere in the ESV. To be fair, there’s only one instance where the noun ποιμήν is used in the church context.]

**Shepherds of a Church:**

John 21:16 He said to him a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “**Tend** (ποιμαίνω) my sheep.”

[Note: The ESV says, “Tend” to the to sheep, but the verb is shepherd. Peter is told to shepherd Christ’s sheep.]

Eph 4:11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the **shepherds** and teachers,

[This is the only instance where a translation might say, “pastor,” but the ESV translates it as shepherd. I think that’s a better translation to be fair, communicating better that which is implied and making it harder for a person employed in church work to get too big for his britches, so to speak. Shepherds were NOT highly regarded in New Testament life, so it’s not exactly bestowing a prestigious name on a church leader. This, of course, raises the question about what might be wise to label church leaders, but we will return to that in coming sessions.]

1 Peter 5:2 **shepherd** the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

[These give us a feel for the concept of shepherd and shepherding God’s people. But, how do these three terms related to one another?]

**Elders, Overseers, and Shepherds are not synonymous terms, but do refer to the same group of people.**
• **Elders, in their role as overseers, are to shepherd the flock.**

Acts 20:17 Now from Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders (πρεσβύτερος) of the church to come to him. …

Acts 20:28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock (ποιμνιον), in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (ἐπίσκοπος), to care for (ποιμάνω; feed KJV, shepherd NASB) the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.

• **Elders are to shepherd the flock, overseeing it.**

1 Peter 5:1–2 So I exhort the elders (πρεσβύτερος) among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd (ποιμάνοι) the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight (ἐπισκόπεω), not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;

“That the titles elder, pastor, and overseer all describe the same person is made clear by the use of all three words to describe the same person in Acts 20:17, 28. The term ‘pastor’ emphasizes their shepherding or feeding function, ‘overseer’ their authority and leading function, and ‘elder’ their spiritual maturity.” ~John MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 218

[Elders, Overseers, and Shepherds are not synonymous terms, but do refer to the same group of people.]

Questions?

Comments?

Concerns?
Appendix I: Session Three Handout

Session Three: Elders: Plurality and Parity

PLURALITY

Historical Perspectives:

- “London Baptist Confession of Faith” (1644/46) dictates that each local church is to choose qualified “elders and deacons” for the “feeding, governing, serving, and building up” of the church.
- “London Baptist Confession of Faith” (1689) notes that the officers of the church are “bishops or elders, and deacons.”
- “Abstract of Principles” (1858), which is still the governing doctrinal statement at both The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY, and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, NC, lists church officers as bishops or elders and deacons.
- “Baptist Faith and Message” (1925) noted that the “Scriptural officers are bishops, or elders, and deacons.”


PARITY

Church Constitution:

- “The elders shall exercise oversight over the church ministries and functions and have the general oversight over all of this church's affairs.”
- “The conduct of all church business and the work of all church organizations shall be subject to their supervision and oversight.”
- The church constitution continues in regard to their collective tasks to note that, “In keeping with biblical principles (e.g., Acts 6:1–6 and 1 Peter 5:1–4), the elders shall devote their time to prayer, to the ministry of the Word (by teaching and encouraging sound doctrine), and to leading, guiding, and shepherding God’s flock.”

Biblical Demarcation: Vocational vs. Non-Vocational

“Section 3 – The (Senior) Pastor
The (senior) pastor shall be an elder and shall, therefore, perform the duties of an elder described in Section 2. He shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching. He shall preach on the Lord’s Day, officiate at the observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and perform such other duties as usually pertain to that office.”

1 Timothy 3:1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. (ESV) (cf. calling and/or vocation (Latin vocare))
1 Timothy 5:17–18 [17] Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. [18] For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” (ESV)

1 Corinthians 9:9 For it is written in the Law of Moses (i.e., Deut 25:4), “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? (ESV)

(CONTEXT: 1 Cor 9:3-7, 8-12a)

Q: What’s the preferred nomenclature? Elder(s) vs. Pastor(s)

- The difference is in workload, not so much a difference in the nature of the work.
- The difference is not so much in the work, but in the workload.

“Not all elders will have the same burden of preaching and teaching. ‘Some may teach or preach infrequently, some constantly. Those whose ministry demands all their attention should be freed from any need to earn a living and be cared for and even rewarded for their singular devotion.’” ~John MacArthur, 1 Timothy, 220.

Q: How should we communicate plurality and parity?

“That the titles elder, pastor, and overseer all describe the same person is made clear by the use of all three words to describe the same person in Acts 20:17, 28. The term ‘pastor’ emphasizes their shepherding or feeding function, ‘overseer’ their authority and leading function, and ‘elder’ their spiritual maturity.” ~John MacArthur, 1 Timothy, 218

CONCLUSION

When a church has a plurality of leadership with a distinction between paid and unpaid leaders, vocational and non-vocational elders, for example, the roles can be seen to be delineated between those who do the ministry and those who give advice and/or make decisions respectively. In other words, the role of the vocational elder(s) becomes distinct from the non-vocational elders, who may be seen as more of a decision-making board than those who also shepherd the flock. Though the church might not state it this way, the church can, practically speaking, have two different categories* of elders, teaching elders as opposed to ruling elders.

*Although Presbyterian groups will often have hardline distinctions between categories of elders (e.g., teaching versus ruling versus shepherding), it is argued that not only is a plurality of elders the most biblically faithful approach for Baptist churches, but also that the parity among elders without categorical distinctions is most in accord with Scripture. There may be different emphases due to giftedness, experience, and/or training, but distinctions are among equals who share the burden of shepherding the flock and some may be able to carry more of the load due to being free from other vocational pursuits.
Appendix J: Session Three Researcher’s Notes

Session Three: Elders: Plurality and Parity

[Review: Elders = Overseers = Shepherds/Pastors]

PLURALITY

[Within the SBC, a plurality of elders is the minority report, but it is not a novel approach in Baptist history. In fact, a study of Baptist doctrinal statements validates that ecclesiastical approach to polity. It’s also noteworthy that the SBC is the only denominational group seen as going from being theologically moderate/liberal to conservative/fundamentalist, which took place over the past forty years. It may be coincidence, but the 1963 Baptist Faith and Message shows a change in terminology, a time when the SBC was not known for being associated with the inerrancy of Scripture and other seemingly conservative issues.]

Historical Perspectives:
- “London Baptist Confession of Faith” (1644/46) dictates that each local church is to choose qualified “elders and deacons” for the “feeding, governing, serving, and building up” of the church.
- “London Baptist Confession of Faith” (1689) notes that the officers of the church are “bishops or elders, and deacons.”
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- “Baptist Faith and Message” (1925) noted that the “Scriptural officers are bishops, or elders, and deacons.”


[In Acts 14:23 a pattern is established that would become the norm thereafter, the appointing of elders “in every church.” That is, there would be elders (plural) in every church (singular). Acts 11:30 mentions elders at the church of Antioch. The elders of the church in Jerusalem are referenced many times. (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4; 21:18) The church in Philippi had elders and deacons. (Phil 1:1) James 5:14 mentions the “elders of the church” and their role in prayer. The reason Paul left Titus in Crete, so that he might “appoint elders in every town.” (Titus 1:5). Since this era had one church per town, it should be evident that he is to appoint a plurality of leadership, elders, for each congregation.]

PARITY

Church Constitution:
- “The elders shall exercise oversight over the church ministries and functions and have the general oversight over all of this church's affairs.”
• “The conduct of all church business and the work of all church organizations shall be subject to their supervision and oversight.”
• The church constitution continues in regard to their collective tasks to note that, “In keeping with biblical principles (e.g., Acts 6:1–6 and 1 Peter 5:1–4), the elders shall devote their time to prayer, to the ministry of the Word (by teaching and encouraging sound doctrine), and to leading, guiding, and shepherding God’s flock.”

Biblical Demarcation: Vocational vs. Non-Vocational

[The church constitution articulated a plurality and parity with regard to the elders. The constitution, however, also made a special category for one of those elders referred to as “the pastor,” one who would be an elder employed by the congregation. The constitution states that, the pastor “shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching.”]

[From the church constitution …]

“Section 3 – The (Senior) Pastor
The (senior) pastor shall be an elder and shall, therefore, perform the duties of an elder described in Section 2. He shall be recognized by the church as particularly gifted and called to the full-time ministry of preaching and teaching. He shall preach on the Lord’s Day, officiate at the observance of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and perform such other duties as usually pertain to that office.”

1 Timothy 3:1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. (cf. calling and/or vocation (Latin vocare))

[The Bible does speak to the idea of elders receiving wages from the church, contrary to some who utilize a plurality of elders (e.g., some Plymouth Brethren, Church of Christ)]

1 Timothy 5:17–18 [17] Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. [18] For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” (ESV)

1 Corinthians 9:9 For it is written in the Law of Moses (Deut 25:4), “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” Is it for oxen that God is concerned? (ESV)

[CONTEXT: 1 Cor 9:3-7, 8-12a

In designating the vocational elder as “the pastor,” it could well be inferred that the other elders are not pastors, even though they are also called to shepherd/pastor the flock. Practically speaking, the 2 categories of elder can be seen as having different roles. The intention was to note a different proportion of the care of the flock falling upon the one with the greatest opportunity to do so, that is, the employed elder, or pastor, since he had been freed from other pursuits by financial support from the church. The elder parity, instead, becomes minimized particularly as the employed elder, performs the vast majority of the public teaching.]
Q: What’s the preferred nomenclature? Elder(s) vs. Pastor(s)

- The difference is in workload, not so much a difference in the nature of the work.
- The difference is not so much in the work, but in the workload.

[MONEY for some who need to be freed up (cf. Acts 6)]

“Not all elders will have the same burden of preaching and teaching. ‘Some may teach or preach infrequently, some constantly. Those whose ministry demands all their attention should be freed from any need to earn a living and be cared for and even rewarded for their singular devotion.’ ~John MacArthur, 1 Timothy, 220.

Q: How should we communicate plurality and parity?

“That the titles elder, pastor, and overseer all describe the same person is made clear by the use of all three words to describe the same person in Acts 20:17, 28. The term ‘pastor’ emphasizes their shepherding or feeding function, ‘overseer’ their authority and leading function, and ‘elder’ their spiritual maturity.” ~John MacArthur, 1 Timothy, 218

- Need to be solidified in our minds and communicate that to the flock. Also, we need to communicate that to future, potential elders.
- N.B. I have tried to communicate that in non-verbal ways (e.g., other elders baptizing, other elders officiating the Lord’s Supper, encouraging our elders to preach on Sunday morning).

CONCLUSION

When a church has a plurality of leadership with a distinction between paid and unpaid leaders, vocational and non-vocational elders, for example, the roles can be seen to be delineated between those who do the ministry and those who give advice and/or make decisions respectively. In other words, the role of the vocational elder(s) becomes distinct from the non-vocational elders, who may be seen as more of a decision-making board than those who also shepherd the flock. Though the church might not state it this way, the church can, practically speaking, have two different categories* of elders, teaching elders as opposed to ruling elders.

*Although Presbyterian groups will often have hardline distinctions between categories of elders (e.g., teaching versus ruling versus shepherding), it is argued that not only is a plurality of elders the most biblically faithful approach for Baptist churches, but also that the parity among elders without categorical distinctions is most in accord with Scripture. There may be different emphases due to giftedness, experience, and/or training, but distinctions are among equals who share the burden of shepherding the flock and some may be able to carry more of the load due to being free from other vocational pursuits.

Questions? Comments? Concerns?
Appendix K: God’s Effectual Calling of All Christians

Romans 1:6 - including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ,

Romans 1:7 - To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:28 - And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:30 - And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

Romans 9:11 - though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—

Romans 9:24 - even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles?

Romans 11:29 - For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.

1 Corinthians 1:2 - To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:

1 Corinthians 1:9 - God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:24 - but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

1 Corinthians 1:26 - For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

1 Corinthians 7:18 - Was anyone at the time of his call already circumcised? Let him not seek to remove the marks of circumcision. Was anyone at the time of his call uncircumcised? Let him not seek circumcision.

1 Corinthians 7:20 - Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called.

1 Corinthians 7:21 - Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)

1 Corinthians 7:22 - For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ.
1 Corinthians 7:24 - So, brothers, in whatever condition each was called, there let him remain with God.

Galatians 1:6 - I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—

Galatians 1:15 - But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace,

Galatians 5:8 - This persuasion is not from him who calls you.

Galatians 5:13 - For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Ephesians 1:18 - having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,

Ephesians 4:1 - I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,

Ephesians 4:4 - There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—

Philippians 3:14 - I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:15 - And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

1 Thessalonians 2:12 - we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

1 Thessalonians 4:7 - For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

1 Thessalonians 5:24 - He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

2 Thessalonians 1:11 - To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power,

2 Thessalonians 2:14 - To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 6:12 - Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.
2 Timothy 1:9 - who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

Hebrews 3:1 - Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,

Hebrews 9:15 - Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant.

James 2:7 - Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

1 Peter 1:15 - but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

1 Peter 2:9 - But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

1 Peter 2:21 - For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

1 Peter 3:9 - Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

1 Peter 5:10 - And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

2 Peter 1:3 - His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,

2 Peter 1:10 - Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

Jude 1 - Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, To those who are called, beloved in God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ:
Session Four: Elders: Shepherding through Teaching

REVIEW:
- The authoritative role of the elder in the life of God’s covenant people is established in the Old Covenant community, but later refined and defined as the highest human authority within a particular congregation.
- The terms elders and overseers refer to the same group of people, whose task it is to collectively shepherd/pastor the flock.
- The New Testament describes and prescribes a plurality and parity of elders, whereby those paid are expected to do more of the work, not different work.

PRIMACY OF TEACHING

Paul’s key requirement for elders, as opposed to deacons, is ability to teach (διδάσκω) (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9).

In Acts 6, the apostles seemingly establish a pattern where the deacons of a congregation labor to free up the elders to focus on the ministry of the word and prayer.

Teaching is not the only way in which elders shepherd the flock, but it is primary.

“To preach and teach God’s Word is the primary task of elders (1 Tim 4:6, 11, 16; 5:17; 2 Tim 2:15, 24; Titus 2:1). (John MacArthur, I Timothy, 108)

Q: What is the difference between teaching (διδάσκω) and preaching (κηρύσσω)?

Matthew 4:23 And [Jesus] went throughout all Galilee, teaching (διδάσκω) in their synagogues and proclaiming (κηρύσσω) the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

Matt 9:35 Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching (διδάσκω) in their synagogues and proclaiming (κηρύσσω) the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

Matthew 11:1 … Jesus … went to “teach (διδάσκω) and preach (κηρύσσω)” in their cities.

Luke 20:1 “Jesus was teaching (διδάσκω) the people in the temple and preaching the gospel (εὐαγγελίζω).”

Acts 5:42 “Every day, in the temple and from house to house, [the apostles] did not cease teaching (διδάσκω) and preaching (εὐαγγελίζω).”

Acts 15:35 But Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching (διδάσκω) and preaching (εὐαγγελίζω) the word of the Lord.”
Acts 28:31 [Paul was] proclaiming (κηρύσσω) the kingdom of God and teaching (διδάσκω) about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Romans 2:21 you then who teach (διδάσκω) others, do you not teach (διδάσκω) yourself? While you preach (κηρύσσω) against stealing, do you steal?

2 Tim 4:2 preach (κηρύσσω) the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (διδαχή).

N.B. Matthew 7:28–29 And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching (διδαχή), for he was teaching (διδάσκω) them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

That which we might think of as a sermon does not seem to be akin to “preaching” in the New Testament. Perhaps a better English word to convey the gist of κηρύσσω would be “proclaim.”

PRACTICAL QUESTIONS:

Q: Do assertions that, “A woman may teach, but not preach,” have any biblical support?

1 Timothy 2:12 I do not permit a woman to teach (διδάσκω) or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.

Q: Does the Bible distinguish between ruling and teaching elders?

1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching (λόγος) and teaching (διδασκαλία).

Q: What are the ramifications of an employed elder with regard to shepherding, in general, and preaching/teaching, in particular?

Q: How might we, even inadvertently, confuse our congregation when it comes to plurality and parity among the elders?

Q: What are some ways we might reinforce the Bible’s teaching regarding those who shepherd the flock?

Q: Why might the primary worship service be given priority among the things a church does?

Q: Should a church ever need to replace the elder who is primarily responsible for the Sunday morning sermons, what might that process look like? What qualities should be sought?

Q: How can we help elders and even potential elders grow in their proficiency with regard to preaching and teaching?
CONCLUSIONS

The elders are collectively responsible to ensure the doctrinal soundness of all instruction, either by doing the teaching themselves or by ensuring any who teach are biblically sound. (Acts 20:28-31)

Formal education, like seminary, can certainly be helpful, but it is not a requirement for an elder, even a vocational elder. Alexander Strauch notes that being apt to teach entails three things: “a knowledge of Scripture, the readiness to teach, and the ability to communicate.” (Biblical Eldership, 195)

An elder may have greater affinity and/or experience in some aspects of shepherding the flock, but each elder is qualified, by virtue of being an elder, for any and all aspects of elder responsibilities, including preaching. However, experience and employment may well lead to certain elders carrying more of the load in certain areas. In each area, further education and experience would yield greater proficiency.

To qualify, a man need not necessarily be a dynamic speaker. A biblically qualified man with the desire should be considered with the assumption that he can and should grow in not only godliness, but also in his proficiency to shepherd the flock, including teaching.

Not all elders will have the same burden of preaching and teaching. ‘Some may teach or preach infrequently, some constantly. Those whose ministry demands all their attention should be freed from any need to earn a living and be cared for and even rewarded for their singular devotion.” (John MacArthur, 1 Timothy, 220)

There is nothing in Scripture to contradict the plurality, nor the parity of elders. They have the same qualifications, the same tasks, and the same authority. The only biblical distinction made regarding elders is in the potential for the church to remunerate as needed and/or desired. (1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Cor 9:6-12)
Appendix M: Session Four Researcher’s Notes

Session Four: Elders: Shepherding through Teaching

REVIEW: [of previous sessions’ main points]
- The authoritative role of the elder in the life of God’s covenant people is established in the Old Covenant community, but later refined and defined as the highest human authority within a particular congregation.
- The terms elders and overseers refer to the same group of people, whose task it is to collectively shepherd/pastor the flock.
- The New Testament describes and prescribes a plurality and parity of elders, whereby those paid are expected to do more of the work, not different work. [Different workload, not different work.]

PRIMACY OF TEACHING

Paul’s key requirement for elders, as opposed to deacons, is ability to teach (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9).

In Acts 6, the apostles seemingly establish a pattern where the deacons of a congregation labor to free up the elders to focus on the ministry of the word and prayer.

Teaching is not the only way in which elders shepherd the flock, but it is primary.

“To preach and teach God’s Word is the primary task of elders (1 Tim 4:6, 11, 16; 5:17; 2 Tim 2:15, 24; Titus 2:1). (John MacArthur, 1 Timothy, 108)

Q: What is the difference between teaching (διδάσκω) and preaching (κηρύσσω)?
- [“Preaching is to the heart. Teaching is to the head.”]
- [“You teach to inform. You preach to persuade.”]
- [“Teaching entails information. Preaching entails application.”]
- [“A teacher is reserved. A preacher is loud and probably sweaty.”]
- [“I know it when I see it.” (handouts and outlines verse sharing what’s on the heart)]

[There is much debate as to the difference between teaching and preaching. Some would contend teaching is for edifying the church and preaching is for evangelizing the lost. Others would argue that teaching is the transfer of information only, whilst preaching applies truth with the expectation of response. For some, the difference is in location; behind the pulpit is preaching everything else is teaching. For others, preaching is characterized by passion and perhaps even volume or direct imperatives. Some may say they know it when they see/hear it, though it would be hard to categorically define. Others might see this as a distinction without difference.]
[Q: What is the difference between teaching (διδάσκω) and preaching (κηρύσσω)?]

[Some may use the terms as synonyms, but the Bible does make a distinction between preaching and teaching. For example, there are texts that draw a distinction between the two by at least depicting them as two different activities, even if both occur.]

Matthew 4:23 And [Jesus] went throughout all Galilee, teaching (διδάσκω) in their synagogues and proclaiming (κηρύσσω) the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people.

Matt 9:35 Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching (διδάσκω) in their synagogues and proclaiming (κηρύσσω) the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.

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2 Tim 4:2 preach (κηρύσσω) the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching (διδαχή).

N.B. Matthew 7:28–29 And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching (διδαχή), for he was teaching (διδάσκω) them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

[“Sermon on the Mount” … Was Jesus preaching or teaching?]
PRACTICAL QUESTIONS:

Q: Do assertions that, “A woman may teach, but not preach,” have any biblical support?

1 Timothy 2:12 I do not permit a woman to teach (διδάσκω) or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.

Q: Does the Bible distinguish between ruling and teaching elders?

1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching (λόγος) and teaching (διδασκάλια).

[CONTRAST is not between those who teach and those who rule, but rather among those who rule between those do some teaching and preaching and those who do MORE teaching and preaching.]

Q: What are the ramifications of an employed elder with regard to shepherding, in general, and preaching/teaching, in particular?

[Q: Is teaching, in general, for all elders, but preaching, in particular, reserved for the paid clergy?]

[A: That seems an unsupportable notion. Instead, if a distinction is to be made, it would seem teaching is what is done in the church by those in charge of the spiritual development of those within the body of Christ, whilst preaching of the gospel, in the sense of proclamation of said gospel with the intention of conversion, would take place outside of the church, and not during the Sunday morning sermon.]

[There is a distinction between the preaching and teaching, but there is nothing in the biblical usage of the terms to indicate one is performed on a Sunday morning by a paid elder whilst the other may be performed by non-vocational elders in other venues.]

Q: How might we, even inadvertently, confuse our congregation when it comes to plurality and parity among the elders?

[Titles: “Pastor” or “teaching elder”]

Q: What are some ways we might reinforce the Bible’s teaching regarding those who shepherd the flock?

[Visibly sharing the workload, even occasionally, especially Sunday sermon.]

Q: Why might the primary worship service be given priority among the things a church does?

• [Never have a greater portion of the congregation together.]
• [That which is mandatory (Heb 10:24-25).]
• [That which is the first impression many will have of us.]
Q: Should a church ever need to replace the elder who is primarily responsible for the Sunday morning sermons, what might that process look like? What qualities should be sought?

- [Character, which is hard to know over a weekend. (1 Tim 5:22)]
- [Affection, devotion, knowledge of Bible.]
- [Theological conformity: 5 Solas, Baptism]
- [Inerrancy, etc.]

Q: How can we help elders and even potential elders grow in their proficiency with regard to preaching and teaching?

[Education and experience]

CONCLUSIONS

The elders are collectively responsible to ensure the doctrinal soundness of all instruction, either by doing the teaching themselves or by ensuring any who teach are biblically sound. (Acts 20:28-31)

Formal education, like seminary, can certainly be helpful, but it is not a requirement for an elder, even a vocational elder. Alexander Strauch notes that being apt to teach entails three things: “a knowledge of Scripture, the readiness to teach, and the ability to communicate.” (Biblical Eldership, 195)

[ILL. Student I taught at SWBTS in preaching class who said he was, “called to preach,” but was terrible at it reveals misconceptions. There’s no office of preacher, but of elder, who shepherds, a portion of that is giving a sermon. It’s the church who calls and affirms. It’s an individual who has a desire to be an overseer/elder. (1 Tim 3:1)]

An elder may have greater affinity and/or experience in some aspects of shepherding the flock, but each elder is qualified, by virtue of being an elder, for any and all aspects of elder responsibilities, including preaching. However, experience and employment may well lead to certain elders carrying more of the load in certain areas. In each area, further education and experience would yield greater proficiency.

[N.B. There’s a difference between offices and roles.]

To qualify, a man need not necessarily be a dynamic speaker. A biblically qualified man with the desire should be considered with the assumption that he can and should grow in not only godliness, but also in his proficiency to shepherd the flock, including teaching.

Not all elders will have the same burden of preaching and teaching. ‘Some may teach or preach infrequently, some constantly. Those whose ministry demands all their attention should be freed from any need to earn a living and be cared for and even rewarded for their singular devotion.” (John MacArthur, 1 Timothy, 220)
There is nothing in Scripture to contradict the plurality, nor the parity of elders. They have the same qualifications, the same tasks, and the same authority. The only biblical distinction made regarding elders is in the potential for the church to remunerate as needed and/or desired. (1 Timothy 5:17-18; 1 Cor 9:6-12)

Questions?

Comments?

Concerns?

Reflections on sessions?
1. What are the offices of the church as you understand them?

*Elders and deacons (plural for each), for an individual congregation, are the only biblically prescribed church offices.*

2. Define the role of elders throughout the Old and New Testaments, including first century Jewish life.

*In the Old Testament, the elders of Israel seem to be an authoritative and advisory group prominent in the Mosaic Covenant community. They were called to join Moses on the mountain and were summoned at many key events in the life of Israel. Their qualifications, beyond the assumption of a certain minimum age and experience, are uncertain.*

*In the New Testament, the elders in Jewish life were a notable authoritative group. They were key in evaluating Jesus and were even part of the conspiracy to kill Him.*

*In the New Covenant community, the elders are important in decision-making in the life of the early church, as is seen in the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. They are the successors to the apostles in their authoritative role and there is no authority for a congregation above them. Each congregation seems to have had a plurality of elders and strict requirements are given in the Pastoral Epistles. The New Testament also gives explicit instructions regarding what they are to do in their role.*

3. How has the role of elder changed since the completion of the New Testament? In other words, as culture and professions have evolved, how has that influenced and necessitated a change in the role of elder?

*The role of elder, by that name, is rather rare presently. Instead, churches often employ a professional, ordained, and preferably seminary educated, individual to do the lion’s share of ministry, especially preaching. If there are others in leadership, they are seen as lesser in authority and responsibility, especially when it comes to preaching. Instead of cultivating elders who shepherd the flock, churches will often form a pulpit committee to hire a dynamic speaker to help grow the church.*
4. **Explain the relationship of these terms as they relate to one another: Elders, overseers, and pastors/shepherds.**

*Elders and overseers refer to the same group of people who are collectively tasked with shepherding, or pastoring, the church. The terms are not synonymous, but the terms can be used interchangeably to describe the same individuals. In the New Testament, there is not only plurality, but also parity among those who serve the church as leaders, regardless of whether or not one is vocationally employed in that role by the church. There may be a difference in workload, but not in the work to which they are collectively called by the church.*