



Riverview Church Membership Class: Part 3

How We Function as a Church

For many of you, Riverview is your first church experience. You've never been involved in another church before.

For some, you're coming from other churches or denominations. Some of you have even come from other religions. Because of this, the way we "do church" at Riv might seem pretty different to you.

It's important to note that there is a lot of freedom in how a church chooses to structure itself. Scripture does lay down some parameters, but gives little guidance to the ultimate "org chart" of a local congregation.

This paper serves as a description of how we at Riverview try to apply scripture principles of church governance to our context. While we feel confident in our model, we understand there is tremendous freedom to utilize different models and we are constantly tweaking ours as our church grows and our needs change.

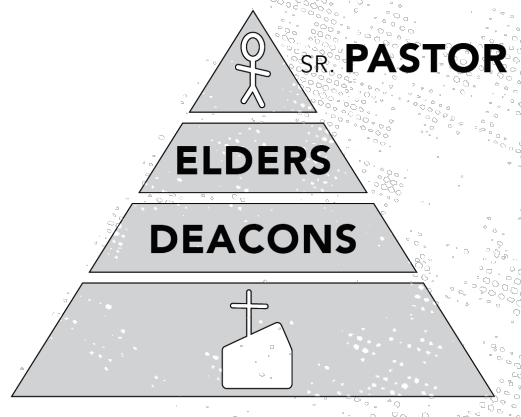
In scripture, there are only two prescribed offices for the church: Elders and Deacons. Elders serve the church by leading, Deacons lead the church by serving. They are both servant leaders. These are the only two categories of leaders that are clearly defined and prescribed for the church in the New Testament. With these offices come character qualifications that help us appoint these leaders. You can find these listed in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

In Acts 20, Paul calls the Elders of the Ephesian church to a meeting and gives them this challenge:

"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." (Acts 20:28)

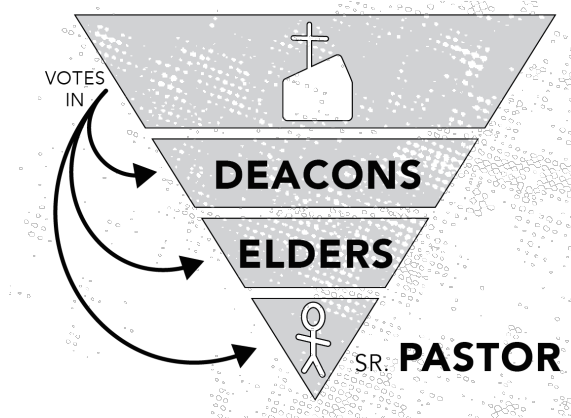
Here we see that there are three interchangeable terms used for the same office: Elder, Pastor (Shepherd), and Overseer.

Again, there is tremendous freedom in how to structure the Church. Here's a common scheme that has been used historically:

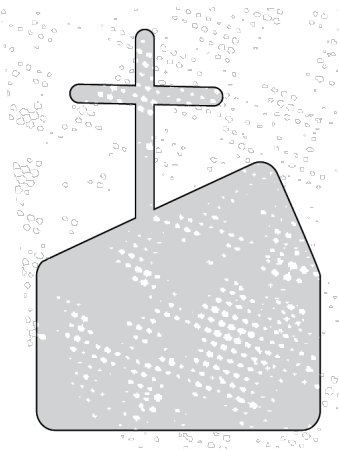


This is a very common model here in the U.S. The problem here is that there is one guy at the top of this pyramid that is leading the charge of the entire organization, without much opportunity for accountability.

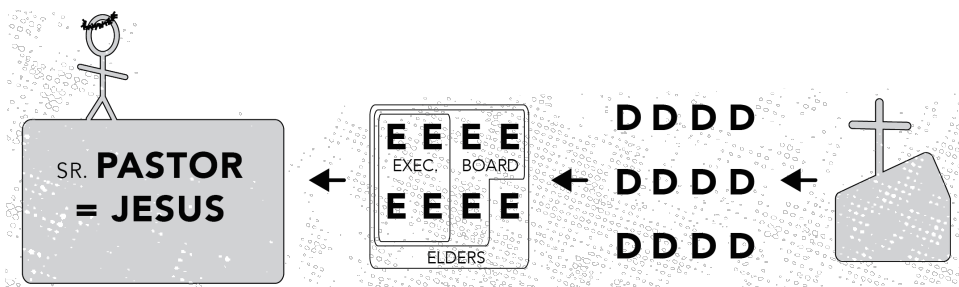
Another common structure in America is the exact opposite: The Church as a whole is in charge, they vote in a team of elders, deacons, and a senior pastor. The problem here is that it is more American than it is Biblical – driven by democracy rather than scripture. It creates the opportunity for the elders and deacons to become like politicians, where they can't say anything unpopular without fear of losing their position. So, there are some inherent issues there.



A Third model is where the church is out there all alone with no real leadership. This violates a verse we read earlier in this class, Hebrews 13:17: "Obey your leaders and submit to them..." You can't submit to a leader if you don't have one.



Riverview operates under a very different model. Our "senior pastor" is Jesus. He is the only one that we deem is worthy of being on that pedestal at the top. Following Jesus we have our elders (or pastors), then deacons, then the rest of the church.



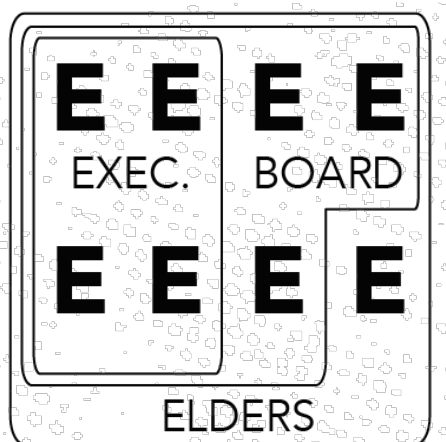
So what does this mean? It is the Elders' responsibility to lead and shepherd the church to Jesus. The Deacons are there to assist the Elders in that effort, and then the church follows along. We all follow after Jesus. This is a "straight-line" principle. We are all marching ahead toward Jesus.

The advantage of this structure is that it does not create a "false hierarchy" within the church where one person is elevated above everyone else, or where that is inverted so that the church body is above the leaders. We follow our Elders as they follow Jesus!

At the time of this printing, we have eight elders at Riverview. There may be many more by the time you go through this material. This poses an obvious question: "How do we get eight (or more) elders to agree on going to lunch, let alone leading a church?"

The way we have structured this at Riverview is this: Within our Elders, we have what we call our "Executive Team." These men are delegated responsibility to lead the church in strategic areas, public vision areas, etc. This allows the other Elders to work in their specific area of responsibility that maximizes the application of their giftedness.

Separately, Seven of the Eight Elders serve as the "Board of Directors." This is the legal board of Riverview. In many churches, this group would be made up completely of paid staff or completely of volunteers, but at Riverview we've set up this group with a mixture of both.



For instance, in our Human Resources department, we make sure that it is led by one of our Bi-Vocational Elders (we don't pay him to be an Elder, he's a volunteer) so that there is accountability in setting salaries, budgets, etc. He works with a team of volunteers (deacon-level members of our community) to accomplish this with integrity and honor. Additionally, we have an annual audit by a group that comes in from outside Riverview to make sure there's nothing fishy going on in our finances.

For a current listing of our pastors/elders and their current areas of focus, go to RivChurch.com/about/leadership.

So, leading after Jesus, we have our Pastors (Elders) and we have our Deacons.

Just like we don't throw around the term Elder too often around here because it's confusing to lots of people, we also don't use the term "Deacon" very much, because it's also confusing. At Riverview we have lots of Deacon-level Leaders that serve in major ministry areas. Men that serve in leading our venues, women that lead in different areas of counseling and care, and lots of other places. There are a lot of Deacon-level people leading in our church behind the scenes. For a current listing of our ministry leaders, check out RivChurch.com/about/leadership.

How do we find these people? From the church!

We find our Deacons and Elders within our church, within our Grow, Serve, and Go "system."

	GROW			SERVE	GO
	Gospel	Giving	Faithfulness	Serving	Mission
Apprentice	Know	Yes	Teachable	Somewhere	Aware
Leader	Share	Regular	Reliable	Consistently	Active
Team Lead	Teach	Generous	Trusted	Leading	Owner
Director	Defend	Sacrificial	Above Reproach	Churchwide	Definer

The Top Line in the above Graphic is where we would expect an Apprentice Leader to be (this is a "Leader in Training"). The second two lines describe what we could call Deacon-Level leaders (Team Leads). The bottom line describes the Elders of our church who are ultimately leading the church to follow Jesus.

You can learn a lot more about our leadership development structure by reading "Riverview Leadership Matrix."