

Senior Pastor Roles in Relation to Lay Elders

The Elder Board is composed of lay elders and the Senior Pastor, who serves as one elder among equals. The Senior Pastor is the visible face and spokesman of Grace Bible Church. Although he may or may not serve as chairman of the Elder Board, he serves as the primary voice of Grace to the staff, the congregation, and the community and will be the primary spokesperson for the Elder Board. To establish any other Elder with this role is to needlessly confuse and set the two in competition with each other. It would also ask the lay Elder to duplicate the knowledge, experience, and investment the Senior Pastor already has made.

Our belief is that the Senior Pastor has been called by God and the elders, with input from the congregation, to lead the vision and execution of church activities collaboratively. Although the Senior Pastor is not over the elders, his role is unique in that he has both the time and training necessary for the role. He is immersed in the problems and opportunities of full-time and usually knows the people and organization very well. In addition, his education, experience, and network of fellow pastors provide him with a wealth of information from which to draw.

Although he is paid and professionally trained, the primary work of the Senior Pastor is equipping the saints for the work of ministry. He is not to be expected by the lay elders to personally do the majority of the work of ministry. Similarly, he should not usurp the work of ministry from the elders and the congregation that has called him.

A related concern may be whether a strong leader can be controlled. Some people believe that a strong leadership and domination are synonymous. Of course, this could just as easily be a problem for a lay Elder leading the Elders or an Elder Board. Installing policies that provide checks and balances is a realistic response to this concern. The following are policies adhered to by the Elder Board to keep leaders healthy and ease concerns:

1. The Senior Pastor presents drafts not demands. Every idea from the Senior Pastor is not seen as the voice of God. Rather the Elders are fellow leaders seeking God's will, His direction and wise decisions. Also, lay elders may also present ideas, which should be duly considered.
2. The Senior Pastor is open and honest with the lay elders, and lay elders are open and honest with the Senior Pastor. Counseling matters are usually confidential but even these at times need to be shared

when permission is sought and granted from counselees to share with the Elders. The information the Board needs in order to make a decision is crucial and must not be hidden.

3. The Senior Pastor needs to follow the Elder Board's advice. The Pastor does not always know what is best and needs to listen carefully to the Board's opinions and counsel. The Elder Board respects the Pastor's leadership and does everything to support him both visibly and behind closed doors while the Pastor values highly the Board's advice and does everything to respond to their care for him and the church. Each elder looks to the rest of the Elders to confirm his convictions as to God's leading and direction.
4. The Senior Pastor does not control decisions or demand his way. This would obviously be in direct opposition to Jesus' example of servant leadership. Decision making normally seeks to achieve consensus. If consensus cannot be reached, the Elders decide how much agreement is needed and whether to go forward with a non-consensus decision.
5. Each Elder receives annual feedback from the other Elders, both as a source of encouragement in the continuing work of ministry and as a source of exhortation in areas for growth. The Senior Pastor is included in both the giving and the receiving of this feedback. This mutual accountability is vital to the health of the body and serves as a model for the body.

Summary: Strong collaborative leadership is needed in the Body of Christ. Authority is given by God to be exercised and not feared. Our job is to keep all leaders healthy to function well, to protect them from temptation, to pray for them, and to follow their lead. We believe the best approach to leadership at Grace Bible Church is through an Elder Board comprised of duly selected lay Elders and the Senior Pastor.