

Governing Philosophy of Ministry at EPIC

The church exists to display the beauty and glory of Jesus Christ. The church also exists to help followers of Jesus grow and flourish. Lastly, the church is the means by which God intends to reach the world with the Good News about Jesus. Therefore, God ordained a certain structure to promote a healthy church that fulfills its intended purposes. This structure involves two offices and a committed membership.

Elders

The first office is that of elders. The New Testament explains that a church should be led by a plurality of elders (the term elder is interchangeable with pastor and bishop in the New Testament). According to the New Testament, elders are responsible for the primary leadership and oversight of a church. The function and role of an elder is well summarized by Alexander Strauch in his book *Biblical Eldership*: “Elders lead the church (1 Tim 5:17; Titus 1:7; 1 Peter 5:1–2), teach and preach the Word (1 Timothy 3:2; 2 Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:9), protect the church from false teachers (Acts 20:17, 28–31), exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 3:13–17; Titus 1:9), visit the sick and pray (James 5:14; Acts 6:4), and judge doctrinal issues (Acts 15:6). In biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church” (16).

Elders at EPIC:

1. EPIC is led by a plurality of elders.
2. Elders must meet the qualifications laid out in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 and they must continue to live as faithful examples of Jesus Christ.
3. Elders are selected from the congregation by the current elder team, vetted, and confirmed by the church.
4. Elders ideally serve for a term of 5+ years (the health of the church largely depends on the consistency, commitment, persistence, faithfulness, vision and knowledge of its leaders; therefore, we believe that terms for elders should not be short unless circumstances dictate such a need).
5. Elders meet as a team at minimum once a month for prayer, discussion of vision, planning, and decision making.
6. In addition to monthly meetings, elders shepherd the church in the following 4 ways:
 1. Lead: plan, strategize and cast vision for the direction of the church; oversee the budget; provide encouragement, help and oversight for the staff
 2. Teach: work with the primary teaching pastor at EPIC to ensure that the church is being taught the Scriptures well; ensure that the Bible is being taught well across all ages in various ministries and groups; personally teach others

3. Protect: guard the church from poor doctrine and false teaching; guard people from ruining their lives and heading down a path of destruction; lead in church discipline if necessary (Matthew 18)
4. Care: be involved in community and know the people of EPIC well; provide care in crisis situations; coordinate care in conjunction with community groups and the deacon team
7. New elders enter a time of training upon appointment that involves reading Biblical Eldership and a book on doctrine, several meetings with the Lead Pastor, and the reception of several resources.

Deacons

The second office described in the New Testament is that of deacons. Deacons, too, have a crucial role in the life and health of the local church, but their role is different from the elders'. The word deacon means servant. The biblical role of deacons is to take care of the physical and logistical needs of the church so that the elders can concentrate on their primary calling. A picture of the deacon ministry can be seen in Acts 6:1-6. In this text 7 men were chosen to handle more practical matters in order to allow the apostles the freedom to continue to focus on their ministry of "prayer and the Word." Like these 7, deacons serve the congregation in whatever practical needs arise so that the elders can focus on leading the church. Like elders, deacons must meet qualifications as laid out in 1 Timothy 3. The Bible does not provide a detailed job description for deacons. Yet based on the pattern established in Acts 6, it seems best to view deacons as servants who do whatever is necessary to allow the elders to accomplish their God-given calling of shepherding the church. Just as the apostles delegated administrative responsibilities to the seven, so the elders are to delegate certain responsibilities to the deacons so that the elders can focus their efforts elsewhere. As a result, each local church is free to define the tasks of deacons based on their particular needs.

Deacons at EPIC

1. Deacons are appointed by the elder team, vetted and confirmed by the church. They must meet the qualifications for a deacon laid out in 1 Timothy 3 and must continue to live as faithful examples of Jesus Christ.
2. Deacons commit to a term of 2 years and may be asked to continue serving beyond that term if needed.
3. Deacons at EPIC oversee the benevolence ministry of the church. They receive a budget which they are charged with disseminating as needs arise in the church and community.
4. Deacons assist in the care of the church. Elders will often seek help in reaching out to and ministering to people in the church who are hurting.

5. EPIC's deacon ministry also considers ways that the church can better minister to the poor and hurting in our community.
6. Deacons as EPIC may be called upon to help with logistical matters that are hindering the leadership from performing their calling.
7. The biblical role of deacon is open to men and women. There are women deacons named in the Bible (Romans 16:1-2), 1 Timothy 3:11 should be translated women (not "wives" as it is in certain translations) thus encouraging the appointment of women to this role, and nothing about the role violates the design by God.

Committed Membership

The last component of a healthy church is a committed membership. The New Testament calls Christians to be radically devoted to one another in a local body. Without committed membership the church cannot flourish, be healthy or accomplish its mission. For this reason we encourage people who identify EPIC as their local church to enter into a partnership agreement with one another. It is below.

Biblical Precedence for Partnership

"I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ." Philippians 1:4-6

Why Encourage Partnership?

The church is called the Body of Christ. We are members of one another. As we partner together, the whole church and the world is blessed. When one part does not participate, the whole body suffers (1 Cor 12).

Jesus said that the world will know that we are his disciples if we love one another (John 13:35). One of our greatest witnesses to a lost world is our devotion to one another.

The New Testament is filled with "one another" exhortations further highlighting that following Jesus is not a journey to be taken alone. We are to love one another, exhort one another, correct one another, teach one another, bear one another's burdens, forgive one another, etc. How can we fulfill these "one another" commands outside of deep commitment to the church?

We are called as Christians to: submit to godly leaders (Heb 13:17-18, 1 Thess 5:12-13), support the work of the church (1 Cor 16:1-2, Matt 6:19-21), confront others in sin (Gal 6:1), not forsake assembling together (Heb 10:24-25), and spur one another on to love and good deeds (Heb 10:24-25). All of these things are impossible to do without a

commitment to a local body of believers. The New Testament makes it clear that it is impossible to follow Jesus well without deep connection with other Christians and deep commitment to Jesus' bride, the church. Paul thanked the Philippians for their "partnership in the Gospel." So, based on the commands of Scripture, the need for community in order to grow, and our testimony to the world, we covenant together at EPIC to be Gospel Partners. We are partners because of the Gospel, in the Gospel, and for the Gospel.

Partnership Agreement

First, we are partners because of the Gospel. We are united because of what Jesus has done for us on the cross. Therefore, we affirm the following:

1. I have personally trusted in Jesus Christ' death and resurrection to save me, I have been baptized by immersion and am committed to following Jesus and His commands.
2. I believe that the Bible is the Word of God and is foundational for my knowledge of God, walk with Him, decision-making and the life of the church.
3. I affirm the Nicene Creed as an expression of the foundational elements of my faith.

Second, we are partners in the Gospel. The Gospel is not the ABC's of Christian conversion but the A to Z of the Christian life. In other words, the Gospel is both what justifies us and sanctifies us. So, we seek to grow in the Gospel and help one another grow.

1. I covenant to attend services faithfully as a way of growing personally, supporting the growth of others, and weekly setting aside a day to worship God with others. I will not forsake assembling with this body that I am committing myself to.
2. I covenant to regularly seek opportunities to connect with a smaller group of believers for greater accountability, prayer, mutual edification, more focused Bible Study, and to spur one another on to follow Christ.
3. I covenant that the Gospel will be the lens through which I look at my life.
4. I covenant to confront others if they are living in a way that is "out-of-step" with the Gospel. I will lovingly and graciously confront sin always aware of my need to repent of my own sin. I ask my fellow partners at EPIC to confront me and discipline me if my life is not in line with the Gospel and is hurting the testimony of Christ and His Church.

Third, we are partners for the Gospel. As Christians, we are commissioned by Jesus to make disciples of all nations. God has a mission to rescue people from every tribe, tongue and nation; therefore, He created the church to be His hands and feet in order to

accomplish that mission. So, we are partners in the spread of the Gospel and discipleship of the nations.

1. I covenant to serve the needs of the Body by getting involved in an area of ministry.
2. I covenant to give generously to the work of the ministry.
3. I covenant to consider ways that I can share the Gospel with others, go on mission trips and/or support teams that go, and support efforts by the church to love the community and share the Gospel.