

# Why We Don't Have a Senior Pastor

## grace church position papers

Growing up in a suburban Baptist church setting, there were a few things that could be counted on in every Sunday service. One of those norms was the pastor waiting at the back of the auditorium to shake everyone's hand as they left the sanctuary. Not having this opportunity at Grace was one of the more difficult things for me to adjust to when I began attending the Downtown campus. Most Sundays the teacher had to leave immediately after he stepped off the stage, making it literally impossible to come talk to the pastor right after the service. At first I reacted strongly against this. I thought things would work much better if there was one man running the show. He could even have a council of elders backing him up, but at least there would be one guy in charge and down front. However, I quickly realized that the church actually functioned quite well week after week without having a senior pastor in place. Nevertheless, I personally sought to explore Grace's philosophy on this.

Grace acknowledges that the ultimate head of the Church is Jesus (Ephesians 1:22; 4:15) and operates by what is called an "elder-led" model. This means that instead of having a senior pastor who makes most, if not all, of the decisions for the church, we have a group of men who decide matters by a consensus. These men are chosen by the current elder board based on their character and gifting as it is spelled out in Scripture (1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1). The mandate for elders in church leadership is stated in Ephesians 4:11 and Acts 20:28. In addition, Grace is not what is typically known as a "congregational" church. This means that instead of the entire church body voting to make decisions, we have delegated that authority to a chosen few elders.

As the saying goes, there is strength in numbers. The way this translates to the church is similar to how our country operates. The United States has three branches of power that all make decisions but are each bridled through a system of checks and balances so that no one carries too much weight or wields too much power. In the same way, the elder board at Grace Church is not governed over by a senior pastor. Each decision incorporated by

the board has been instated by a full agreement from every member. Roles and responsibilities do come into play. Members are given influence in diverse places such as teaching and finance, but no one elder is given more power than any other.

This system also creates an atmosphere of spiritual accountability for those shouldering the biggest responsibilities at Grace Church. Elders are free to call each other out and challenge opinions without fear of being overrun by a tyrannical leader. An even playing field allows for the flourishing of the highest level of spiritual accountability and Godly leadership that can be modeled in church government. Through this model, Grace's leadership can be most effective. No one is seeking to hold onto a position of power, but instead all are freed to labor alongside one another in loving, communal plurality.

Ultimately, leadership can make or break the local church. Grace seeks to empower the local body through a system of leadership that is both Biblical and strategic. By stripping away the senior pastor role, the weight of responsibility is carried through a plurality of elders. The equality here diffuses a tendency towards pride and power, opening the gates for genuine community through eldership. It also allows for a myriad of strengths and gifts to shape the decision making process instead of relying on one man. This environment permits our direction to be more fully focused on the glory of God through His bride, the Church.