

Why We Don't Have a Senior Pastor

The model for most churches—particularly in the south—is to have one senior pastor over the staff and congregation. This person is typically responsible for teaching every week, dealing with significant shepherding and discipleship issues, and making decisions for the church. Many who come to Grace Church are accustomed to this type of church organization, and understanding why we don't have a senior pastor can be challenging.

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 (I 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, authority is delegated to the board of elders.

Proverbs 15:22 says, “Plans go wrong for lack of advice; many advisers bring success.” 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 each is 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 by a senior pastor. Each decision made by the board has been instituted by a full agreement from every member. Roles and responsibilities do come into play, and 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 question and challenge one another without fear of being shut down by a single, powerful leader. This even playing field allows for the flourishing of a high level of spiritual accountability and godly leadership. We believe that 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 diverging from the senior pastor model, 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.

