

Harpeth Christian Church

Elder Team Policy Governance

There is no more important leadership than being an elder in God's church! This is why the Bible says that he who aspires to this role aspires to a noble task (1 Timothy 3:1). You are literally leading a spiritual battle for hearts and minds against Satan and his demons.

In your role as an elder at HCC, you will do many countless acts of service for Jesus, including the following:

- Making all the major decisions at the church
- Providing wisdom and guidance for the ministerial staff and people with problems
- Praying for the church on a regular basis – every Thursday Morning and multiple times outside that
- Personally Discipling a handful of people regularly – in a Home Group, Transparency Group, CR, etc.
- Personally giving counsel and guidance to many individuals who want an elder's help
- Being an example of shepherds of God's church

The following document is a summary of the policy governance that was adopted in 2008. This summary describes the inter-relationship of the elders (and their wives), the lead minister/lead pastor-elder, and the ministerial staff at Harpeth Christian Church. In the Bible the words *pastor*, *elder*, and *overseer* refer to the same group which we call *elders*.

Ministers—like the executive minister or teaching minister—typically are not elders at Harpeth Christian Church.

1. Harpeth elders seek first and foremost to be “servants” like Jesus.

Matthew 20: 25-28 (NIV) – “Jesus called them together and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave, just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.’”

2. Harpeth elders seek to be “willing leaders” and “examples” to the Church.

1 Peter 5: 1-4 (NIV) – “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”

- Elders set the example for the church family in the ways of Jesus. Their lifestyle must be focused on Jesus and the fruit of that life, while being holy men, free of addictive lifestyles, drunkenness, and sinful habits. Their marriages are to be strong and their families to be free from activities that might be construed as unholy lifestyles.
- Elders seek to be examples of active church life. They reflect theological and relational disciple making values of the church—each actively in discipling relationships, providing significant financial support of the church (we recommend tithing), and attending the events of the church. Yet they do not feel compelled to attend every single event at the church. Often, when important events or situations arise, to ensure the presence of an elder, the elders may send one of their members as a representative of the group.
- The elders are accountable to each other for Christlikeness, attitude, example, and their leadership. As healthy elders, we call each other into account and inspire one another to godly and courageous lives for the glory of Christ.

3. Harpeth Elders seek unity with each other and only speak with one voice.

Acts 20: 28-31 (NIV) – “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage

wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears.”

- The elders seek to be united and are willing to pay a high price for Jesus-centered unity.
- The elder team will make its decisions by consensus, defined as a simple majority vote. The final decision of any vote will be the position of the entire elder team (as if there were no difference of opinion).
- The elders speak with one voice. When speaking publicly in their capacity as elders, individual elders speak the same thing as the elder group, even if they personally do not agree with a decision.
- The lead elder/pastor works with the executive minister to provide day-to-day advice/wisdom and to serve as the primary voice from the elders to the staff, and, if needed, to the outside world.
- An elder speaks, as an elder, only out of what the elders have agreed upon.

4. Harpeth Elders seek to be Elders, leading with wisdom and maturity.

Titus 1: 5-6 (NIV) – “The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you. An elder must be blameless...”

- An “Elder” is typically an older, wiser Christian (the term used is typically a person 50+ years old). They are persons of experience and wisdom, who have learned many lessons that can help others in life, in their families, and in walking with God.
- *Confidentiality.* Elders will work hard to keep leadership and personal matters confidential as appropriate.
- *Sensitivity.* An elder will never meet alone with a woman; rather he will seek to have his wife or another qualified person present.
- *Involve their wives.* Elders will involve their wives in this ministry wherever possible and insist that their wives support the Harpeth Elders Governance Policy, including the material on “Harpeth Elder’s Wives” (point #10 below) because they are essential to an elder’s leadership in the home and in the church.

5. Harpeth Elders seek to be Overseers, watching over the church.

Acts 20: 8 - Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

- An “Overseer” is responsible for the “oversight” and “guidance” the church.
- The elders are men of faith, seeking Jesus and his ways and to lead the church in the world for Christ’s glory.
- The elders ensure that the staff, deacons, and leaders uphold the policies the elders have established.
- The elders ensure proper standards and systems for proper oversight of finances.
- It is not the elder’s job to oversee everything, but to make sure there is appropriate oversight for every important ministry in the church.

6. Harpeth Elders seek to be Pastors, “shepherding” the sheep.

1 Peter 5: 1-2 (NIV) – “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them.”

- “A Pastor” – The relationship of a shepherd to his sheep is one of closeness and trust. King David used the imagery of God as his shepherd in the 23rd Psalm.
- Harpeth elders cannot “personally pastor” everyone, but they can make sure that everyone “experiences being pastored” (in Home Groups and Transformation Groups).
- It is important that the elders are actively involved in personally shepherding people—especially by helping in our discipling groups—so that they can lead as shepherds who actively know and understand the sheep.

7. Harpeth elders seek to watch over the doctrine and philosophy/ministry of the church.

Titus 1: 6-9 (NIV) – “An elder must be blameless ... He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”

- The elders do not personally teach and disciple everyone, but they make sure everyone has good opportunities to be taught and discipled.
- The elders ensure that both the doctrines and philosophy (Jesus’ method of discipleship) of the church is upheld.
- The elders are responsible to oversee the final stages of church discipline—to guide the church and make sure that proper procedures and protocols, according to the Bible and good wisdom, have been followed.
- The elders will ensure that any person ordained/empowered to ministry is biblically sound and trained for the task which that person is setting out to lead in. The elders make this concrete through laying hands in prayer on those appointed to ministries.

8. Harpeth elders seek to provide the guidance so the staff can lead the church.

A. All the *major policy* decisions in the church will be made by the elders. Then, under these policy decisions, the staff will lead the church on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis (see full Policy Governance document). Harpeth is an elder-guided, staff-led church.

B. The elders empower the lead elder/pastor (who represents the elders) to guide and work with the executive minister, who leads the staff.

- The elders select and provide accountability for the lead pastor.
- The elders will serve in a regular advisory capacity to the lead pastor and, when needed, the executive minister.
- The elders protect the lead pastor from those who would seek to undermine him or his ministry.
- The elders, as a group, provide advice and consent for all ministerial level hiring and firing decisions to the lead pastor (and executive minister).
- The elders will serve as the arbitrator in any disputes with the lead pastor.

C. The elders support and protect the lead minister/pastor-elder (and executive minister). The following details reflect principles that have been developed over many years, through much experience in larger churches and with the counsel and advice of experienced leaders across North America. They establish protocols that protect the leadership from inadvertent power-plays, triangulation, and unhealthy conflict patterns.

- The elders speak with one voice and the lead pastor/executive minister represents the elders to the staff.
- The elders will help shepherd the staff in their personal and family lives, but an elder will not discuss or get involved in work- or staff-related issues with staff members (to avoid triangulation and murmuring) unless he is with the senior minister and/or it is a formal elder meeting.
- An elder may bring up any issue with a staff member and his or her performance, but they are to go through the lead pastor and executive minister (as the proper chain of command) who will be present for the discussion.
- Any staff member who seeks to discuss staff-related difficulties with an elder will be notified of the policy and directed to the lead pastor and/or executive minister for resolution and the elder will not discuss the issue. The elder will likely notify the lead pastor of the expression of concern so that he can seek reconciliation of the staff concern.
- The lead pastor may ask for an elder’s help and involvement with a staff person.
- Staff members are free to bring or to express any concern to the elder group as long as it is in presence of the lead pastor and executive minister and this concern has already been expressed to the lead pastor and executive minister (and not satisfactorily resolved).
- The elders assume that the lead pastor and executive minister are humble with the staff and that they regularly solicit feedback and any negative input that would be helpful to them from a staff point of view.

9. Harpeth elders seek to be men of prayer.

James 5:14-16 (NIV) – “Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”

- The elders and their wives are committed to regular personal prayer.
- The elders set the example for the church by joining the weekly fasting and prayer focus.
- The elders meet every week for a specific elder prayer meeting.
- The elders will meet for prayer on other occasions.
- The elders (and their wives), individually and/or as a group, will make themselves available to the sick and anyone who asks to be anointed with oil for prayer.

10. Harpeth elders seek to lead with the support of their wives.

1 Timothy 3:4,5 (NIV) – “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?)”

The wife of an elder plays an important part in the team’s ministry, often determining its effectiveness. Harpeth elders ask their wives to support the elders by supporting these policies and procedures. The following processes protect the leadership and elders and their wives from inadvertent power-plays, triangulation, and unhealthy conflict patterns.

- ◆ Your spouse needs your full support. He has been chosen to serve in this role and you must faithfully stand with your husband.
- ◆ You have a spiritual responsibility to pray for your spouse. Your spiritual support is essential to his successful leadership in the body of Christ.
- ◆ Disunity in the home means a weak spiritual life, which, in turn, means a weak link in the leadership of the church. Give your husband and the elders the benefit of the doubt, even as you express your concerns to you husband when needed.
- ◆ You and your family are examples, and you now have certain expectations that you may not have considered before. Remember that your attitude speaks louder than words.
- ◆ There may be times when your spouse is aware of things that he is not at liberty to share with you at the moment. You must pray with him without knowing all the facts. There will be times when you are aware of things that the congregation is not. You are expected to remain free from gossip and in an attitude of prayer.
- ◆ Sometimes others may approach you to tell you things to pass on to your spouse so that he will tell the other elders or the senior minister. You are not the listening post for your spouse or for the senior minister. Please stop those who want to use you in this way and insist that they go directly to the source (many times that can be your husband).
- ◆ You may have strong feeling on an issue before the elder team, but it is important that you not try to unduly influence your husband or make it a point to work your husband over to support a specific path or approach you want the pastor-elder team to take.
- ◆ There may be times when individuals will quiz you as to how you feel about certain issues or actions of the elder team. It is inappropriate for you to discuss these issues. As the elders seek to speak with “one voice,” it is important that you too uphold the “one voice” of the elders. If this is difficult for you, make it a priority to work through this issue with the elders and/or the senior minister.
- ◆ Seek to be involved with the wives of the elders. Work to support and uphold the elder and spouse team. The support of elders’ wives for each other and especially for the senior minister’s wife is very, very important.