

## CHURCH GOVERNMENT

### Introduction

Harvest Fellowship Church is committed to building a biblical foundation for church government. Spiritual life is produced when church government and theological correctness are combined with biblical preaching that proclaims the authority of God's Word and the presence of the Holy Spirit. We believe the principles of church government are universal and the scriptural formula for oversight and governance of the local church is relevant in every culture.

### Issues of Concern and Practice

Harvest Fellowship practices an Elder form of government. Although there are other important positions of leadership for instruction and ministry, it is the Elder board that has the responsibility to provide visionary direction and spiritual covering for the ministries of the church.

There are three basic functions of Elders:

1. To lead the church by governing the vision of the church and establishing policies which provide philosophical boundaries for church life.
2. To uphold the biblical standards of behavior among church members. This includes enforcing church discipline for factious behavior, unrepentant sin and doctrinal error.
3. To individually demonstrate a model for ministry and godly living to the people as they lead the church.

Harvest Fellowship Church believes that church policies and philosophies for ministry are best decided when the entire Elder team meets together and discusses, debates and prays. Elder meetings are held regularly and include discussion about policy decisions that affect the congregation as a whole. While the Senior Pastor is the leader of the Elders and is given special respectful consideration, all the Elders have equality relating to input and decision making. Until there is unanimity on an issue, no decision is finalized or acted upon. As the church grows and new ministries are established, the Elders ensure that the ministry remains consistent with the vision of the church and the methods of ministry remain consistent with our principles for ministry.

### Major Points

The office of Elder is a governmental office with spiritual responsibilities and rewards. We believe that one day Jesus will review each Elder's stewardship. Faithful, willing and sacrificial service to the flock of God will result in a heavenly reward. Elders should set the standard in every area of life. While perfection is not possible, an Elder should take his position seriously and strive to uphold the character qualifications necessary for this office in the church.

The first Elders of Harvest Fellowship Church were appointed by Pastor Robert Morris and the Elders of Trinity Fellowship Church in Amarillo, Texas, prior to the start of Harvest Fellowship Church in April 2000. The original group of Elders was given the authority to expand the number of Elders as they determined. Careful consideration is given when choosing an Elder. The qualifications in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 are used to determine a man's ability to minister in the capacity of Elder. Harvest Fellowship Church will only appoint spiritually mature men who are known within the congregation and have served faithfully in the ministries of the church for a season of time. A man must also be gifted governmentally, which is reflected through the following qualities.

The Elder candidate should:

1. Enjoy overseeing the church and desire the office of Elder.
2. Have the disposition of a servant and have a distinct love for people.
3. Have an enthusiasm for every ministry of the church and not have a strong bias towards particular areas.
4. Understand and respect the authority structure of the church.
5. Be able to make decisions and maintain his resolve even in the face of intense and sometimes critical opposition.
6. Be filled with faith for the future and not be overwhelmed by the size of the vision that God has for the church.
7. Support and be able and willing to defend the Eldership publicly and privately.

The Elder role and scope of service:

- Harvest Fellowship Church believes the Senior Pastor should be the leader of the Eldership and should set the agenda for each meeting.
- Harvest Fellowship Church has Elders who are serving as staff of the church and Elders who are not a part of the church staff. While the ratio of staff Elders and non-staff Elders may vary, it is the desire of Harvest Fellowship Church to maintain a balance of both.
- The Elders who are not a part of the church staff are given the responsibility to approve the annual budget and to administrate the compensation packages of the senior staff.
- Harvest Fellowship Church maintains the position that Elders are men only and should serve as the head of the church just as men should serve as the head of the home.
- Decisions are made by the Elders after extensive discussion and prayer and with complete unanimity. Debate is common and differing opinions are welcomed. Every effort is made by each Elder to operate in unity with one another.
- In the event that the Elders of Harvest Fellowship Church reach an impasse with a decision, the Elders will appeal to the full Eldership of Trinity Fellowship Church in Amarillo, Texas.

- The existing Elders have the authority to appoint new Elders as deemed necessary. When new Elders are appointed, the congregation will be notified.
- Elders are appointed for life unless:
  1. They resign for personal reasons.
  2. They are disqualified by sin or a failure to meet the biblical standards of the office.
  3. They leave Harvest Fellowship Church.

### Scriptural References

- 1 Timothy 3:1–7
- Titus 1:5–9
- 1 Peter 5:1–4
- James 5:14–15

### Church Discipline

Harvest Fellowship Church also believes a primary responsibility of leadership is to model and maintain a standard of biblical behavior in the local church. We believe the Lord has given the Elders the responsibility to provide spiritual oversight for those who join the church. His command in 1 Peter 5:1 to “shepherd the flock of God” is something we take seriously. Although we do not believe God has given the Elders absolute responsibility or authority in an individual’s life, we believe there are three specific areas in which we are responsible to give spiritual oversight. Because we believe we are responsible before God to provide this spiritual oversight, we will confront our members on their behavior in these areas. If the situation is not subsequently resolved in a satisfactory fashion, a formal process of church discipline will be initiated.

The areas of spiritual oversight are as follows:

#### 1. Open and blatant sin

*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who had done this deed might be taken away from among you.*

#### 1 Corinthians 5:1–2

#### 2. Issues involving doctrinal error

*But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber.*

#### 2 Peter 2:1–3

#### 3. Divisive and contentious behavior within the congregation

*But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition.*

#### Titus 3:9–11

Every effort will be made to meet with the member who is involved with these issues. Our desire is to help our members grow to maturity through compassionate mentoring. The biblical model of confrontation and correction is not meant to punish people but rather to protect the Body of Christ from the wages of unrepentant sin. Biblical authority is not a license to exert control; it is a responsibility to exert influence for God’s will to be accomplished.

*“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”*

#### Matthew 18:15–17

Our approach to confronting a member of the church involves the following steps:

1. Begins with personal confrontation
2. Expands to committee confrontation
3. Broadens to group confrontation
4. Ends in removal of membership privileges

In confronting sin, we must remember that:

- The *purpose* is redemption.
- The *attitude* is humility.
- The *result* is accountability.

### Conclusion

Biblical government is designed to represent heaven accurately and attack hell successfully. The governmental DNA of the church is produced by pure biblical standards that have not been distorted or damaged by negative influences. The local church is the hope of the world and the hope of the local church is biblical government that operates under the blessing and favor of God.