

eldership and governance

biblical reflections on elders

In Scripture, by the time of the Pastoral Epistles there are only **two church offices** mentioned: **Elders** and **Deacons** (1 Timothy 3:1-8; Titus 1:5-9, Acts 14:23; 20:28; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

We note that:

- In the New Testament, **elder** (*presbuteros*), **overseer** (*episkopos*), and **pastor** (*poimen*) all **refer to the same person/office**.
- Ephesians 4:11 is the only place that a **pastor-teacher** is mentioned, however that is not another office but the same office as **elder/overseer/pastor**, given all elders have to be able to teach.
- In 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:7-9 there is no distinction between pastors and elders because they are the same thing, effectively they are **overseers**.
- Pastors/overseers/elders have the same **function** in Scripture: namely, ruling and teaching.
- In 1 Timothy 3:4-5 an overseer is to *manage or rule* their own house and to *take care* of the church (see Romans 12:8 and 1 Thessalonians 5:12).
- In Acts 20:28 the Ephesian elders/overseers were to shepherd the church; thus both are tasked with ruling/leading the church.

There is no New Testament evidence of three offices, namely **bishop-elder-deacon**, only two. The idea of three offices came into more common use in the mid-2nd century, although not unanimously.

**Be shepherds of the church of God,
which he bought with his own blood.**

— acts 20:28

So why are three terms often used?

Possibly:

- Elder = character: wise and mature.
- Overseer and pastor are functional descriptions of shepherding, ruling and teaching.

So what are modern day pastors?

- From Scripture we could probably say that pastors today are really a **professional class of elders**, but they are not a third office.
- The only senior pastor mentioned in Scripture is Jesus in 1 Peter 5:4 — *the chief shepherd*.

As to authority:

- Elders do have authority in the New Testament—limited as it is and alongside congregational government. We can see this in 1 Thessalonians 5:12; 1 Timothy 5:17; 1 Timothy 3:4-5; Hebrews 13.17 where a distinction is made between the congregation and those that lead it—with authority.

- In Acts 20:28 authority is given by the Holy Spirit, not the congregation—the congregation recognise the authority that is already there.
- We see in Ephesians 4:11 that all gifts are given by the Holy Spirit and include that of pastor-teacher (one thing, not two).

The other office we see is that of Deacon:

- *Diakonos* is used 29 times in the New Testament but only three or four times does it refer to the office of deacon (Romans 16:1; Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8 12).
- Deacons don't have to be able to teach the Word, they have a different function—as outlaid in Acts 6.
- Today their functions might be ushering, facilities, practical, logistics, service oriented, etc.

Of course, we need to note that biblical definitions of church leadership don't easily translate into our modern context, and nor were they intended to. The roles we see in Scripture were determined by the evolution of the early church, and two thousand years later the structure of how churches are organised has dramatically changed.



For instance if we applied Biblical definitions to many of the roles we have today:

- What we call **staff** would actually be called **deacons**.
- Many of our **pastoral staff** today would also be **deacons**—based on perceived gifting.
- All **pastoral staff** would in fact be **elders** and thus should be on the Eldership Team—as is the case with the **Senior Pastor**.
- All **elders** and **pastors** would have the same function and authority—although some would be part-time (voluntary) and not full-time (paid).

At Windsor Park Baptist Church (WP) we take the authority of the Bible seriously and we seek to follow it at all times.

The Bible offers very clear principles for church leadership and provides several illustrations of how those principles were worked out in different early church congregations. However, the Bible is not prescriptive on what form of church government a local church should adopt, and that is why we have diversity of practice across denominations and even within them. At WP we believe a Baptist model of church governance (congregational government) is the clearest application of biblical principles on church organisation, but we also recognise the freedom to organise each local church according to its needs. For this reason WP has a congregational model of church government tied to a Governance Board (elders) who support the ministry leadership (pastors) of the church.

the importance of church governance

In our time, having spiritual leadership at WP is vital and is a significant responsibility. Because of this, all church leadership responsibilities are seen as being spiritual in nature. Thus, governance is a spiritual—and practical—activity that requires our elders to take responsibility.

As author Olan Hendrix writes, 'governance is the coming together of a group of elected individuals to act as one for the purpose of guiding the organisation of which they hold trusteeship toward the accomplishment of its ends, while keeping it in check along the way.'



eldership at windsor park

Churches with the size and scope of WP need a certain leadership function that is largely separate from the day-to-day management of the church, although it is acknowledged that being informed of the operations of the church is in itself an act of spiritual leadership. Thus, the role of an elder at WP is therefore not directly a ministry role in the sense that it is activating church ministry, but it is an oversight role that requires a solid level of spiritual maturity, wisdom and the ability to engage theologically and practically with the issues of the day.

The role of an elder is more closely aligned to having natural influence as part of a team than the ability to enforce one's opinions. We do not, therefore, appoint elders to a position of authority but rather their appointment is where we recognise a spiritual authority that is already present, having been evident in the person's spiritual growth. This could be evident in younger elders if they have displayed an active discipleship journey led by the Spirit—elders do not need to be old!

We're careful to make the distinction that the role of an elder is not in itself a ministry role, lest the position infringe upon the ministries of WP rather than supporting the

ministries of the church. Of course, we expect elders to be involved in practical ministry, but this is not part of their role as elders, their involvement in ministry is something they do as Christians along with everyone else. But when they do so, they do not automatically bring their authority to bear on the practicalities of that ministry. For example, if an elder serves in the Worship Team they do not necessarily have the right to decide which songs are going to be sung because they are an elder; they are not free to go beyond the

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boundaries established by the ministry leader in that case. This is why it's important to separate a role of spiritual authority from a practical ministry role.

The elders are not the ones who run the church; they are not the day-to-day decision



makers but rather they are the guardians of the general welfare of the church and work with the ministry leaders to support the vision and overall direction (and are involved in an oversight capacity in the development of vision and overall direction). We do not recognise elders by what ministry gifts they have, but by their character.

elder should be able to teach, this does not mean that an elder at WP must be a great orator or have a regular place on the preaching roster, but they must have the ability to wrestle with the Bible in all matters of faith and practice (as per our Constitution) and apply it to the governance issues of the day.

While the Scriptures indicate that an

mission and ministry are always the end goal

Governance creates the context for leadership, which creates the context for mission and ministry. It is important to recognise that the end goal of church life is ministry and mission—not leadership or governance per se. We would, therefore, say in summary that the elders are responsible for ensuring that WP is a:

- Christ-centred community
- well-led community
- safe and legal community



expectations of an elder at windsor park baptist church

According to the Constitution of Windsor Park Baptist Church (5.2.2) the Elders are responsible for the oversight of the church, together with the pastor or pastors. This is done through either direct governance in the case of WP, or through delegated authority given to the Trustees of the Equip Trust, the Directors of Windsor Park Hub Limited and the Trustees of the Windsor Park LifeCare Trust—all three governance teams are appointed by the Elders and subsequently ratified by the members at the next Annual General Meeting of the church.

In general, we expect elders to be:

- Able to clearly articulate their faith journey and their theological foundations.
- Supportive of our Beliefs, Ordinances and the Aims & Purposes as set out in Section 1 & 2 of the WPBC Constitution.
- Respected members of WPBC who are wholly committed to the vision and mission of the church together with its health and growth, without any personal ministry agendas.
- Proven contributors to the life of WPBC through active serving, financial generosity and prayer.
- People who will bring their various gifts and abilities to work in a collaborative team environment with the other elders and are prepared to contribute at multiple levels.
- People who have displayed godly character and are seen to be positive role models to others in the congregation.



Our Constitution (5.2.3) prescribes two-year terms of service by elders for a maximum of three consecutive terms. Elders must then have a minimum one-year sabbatical before being eligible for re-election. Although it is open to an individual elder not to seek re-appointment after the first or second two-year term, it is anticipated that a contributing elder would serve out the full six-year term.

WP elders meet on the third Monday evening of each month (except December and January) and converse regularly through email or by other digital forms of communication. There is usually an afternoon or full-day planning session once per year, and there is an expectation that elders would be present at other significant community events in the life of the church. It's not a heavy commitment, but it is a regular commitment.

Additionally, WP places a high value on having an elder present on the governance teams of our other entities [ministries]—the Equip Trust, Windsor Park Hub Limited and the Windsor Park LifeCare Trust. While this is an extra commitment for an elder who is interested in these ministries, it provides a vital point of connection across our governance teams.

Any person interested in serving as an elder should feel free to speak with the Senior Pastor or one of the present elders. Any expression of interest about the possibility of serving as an elder should be submitted in writing to the current Chair of the Elders and should contain a description of a candidate's faith journey and an outline of the ways in which the potential candidate fulfills the qualities and expectations described here.

The current appointed Elders of WPBC are on our website www.windsorpark.org.nz/our-team.

During the 2020 AGM the church was advised that the maximum amount of elders would be raised from eight to 11 to ensure we have greater diversity and also to ensure we have elders serving as part of our three other ministry boards.

The Elders can be contacted at elders@windsorpark.org.nz.



becoming an elder at windsor park baptist church



The process of becoming an elder is articulated in Section 5.2 of our Constitution and is ultimately a decision made by the members of the church at a properly constituted members meeting. In the normal course of our rhythms this is usually undertaken during our Annual General Meeting in March each year.

Anyone is able to nominate someone to be considered as an elder and the existing team works this through; it's accepted that some will be suitable and others won't be suitable—for many reasons—so there are normally ongoing discussions happening at any point as we recognise the cyclical nature of our elders tenure.



induction of elders at windsor park baptist church

When someone is appointed to the Elders Team at WPBC, the following list of actions will help integrate that person into a fuller understanding of the life and mission of Windsor Park. We will make the following resources available within the first few months of serving as an elder:

- The Windsor Park Baptist Church Constitution.
- The last five years of the Windsor Park Group Annual Reports.
- Baptist History and Distinctives, a paper written by Laurie Guy that gives a fuller understanding of what it is to be a Baptist church.
- The latest organisational structure of Windsor Park and a discussion with the Senior Pastor about how the structure works itself out.
- The book, Good Governance is Worth the Effort, by Martyn Norrie (parts of this book were formed within Martyn's role of Chair of Elders at Windsor Park before his retirement to Rotorua).
- Carey's Lifelong Learning online video series, Better Church Elders (<https://vimeo.com/ondemand/betterchurchelders/>).
- The Senior Pastor will provide a personal tour of the Windsor Park campus to meet any key staff and leaders you may not know.
- An experienced elder will be available for the first 12 months to act as a mentor and answer any questions that may arise.



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Some of the material contained in this document is adapted from guidelines contained in the Baptist Churches of New Zealand Administration Manual and the Churches of Christ in Queensland Elder Guidelines Document.

Latest update: 16 June 2026



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