

# **Healthy Eldership**

**A Practical Guide to Raising, Installing, and Leading  
Elders in Plurality**

**By Tim Bice**

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# Chapter 1 My Journey to Plurality of Elders

We planted Greenbriar Church in 2008 with a familiar leadership model: senior pastor led, with a board to advise. As the church grew and we ordained two other pastors, the structure evolved into senior pastor led with associate pastors assisting. It worked—for a season.

But in 2012, everything changed. Through careful study of Scripture and the influential work of Alexander Strauch, particularly his book *Biblical Eldership*, the Lord convicted me that the New Testament pattern is not a single senior leader with helpers, but a plurality of elders leading, shepherding, and governing the church together.

We made the shift to a true plurality of elders. It wasn't easy—there were adjustments, conversations, and growing pains—but it has proven to be one of the greatest gifts from the Lord to our church. Leading alongside trusted brothers has been a profound joy and a tremendous burden-lifter. No longer did ministry rest on one set of shoulders; instead, we shared the load in mutual accountability, diverse gifting, and genuine brotherhood.

This book is an overflow of that biblical conviction and the real-life change it brought to Greenbriar. Along the way, I made plenty of mistakes and stumbled over many right and good things while learning to recruit, train, install, develop, and work effectively with elders. I thank the Lord for His grace in all of it. My hope is that these lessons—from Scripture, experience, and the coaching I've done with other pastors—will equip you to raise up godly elders in your own church, for the health of the flock and the glory of Christ.

Alexander Strauch's *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* has become a landmark resource for churches seeking to align their leadership with the New Testament pattern. Strauch argues compellingly that the Bible consistently presents local church leadership as a plurality of elders—multiple qualified men sharing the same office, authority, and responsibility to shepherd God's flock.

Key teachings include:

- **Plurality as the Norm:** Every New Testament reference to church leadership describes elders (also called overseers or pastors) in the plural (e.g., Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5; Philippians 1:1). This is not optional or cultural but apostolic mandate. A team of elders guards against the dangers of solo leadership—whether autocracy, burnout, or unchecked blind spots—and reflects the shared, familial nature of the church under Christ's sole headship.

- **Elders' Core Role:** Elders are shepherd-leaders who **teach** sound doctrine, **shepherd** (care for, protect, and guide) the flock, and **oversee** (govern) the church with servant-hearted humility. They must meet strict biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9), emphasizing character over charisma or position.
- **First Among Equals:** While all elders share equal authority and status in the office—no official hierarchy or superior class—there is functional diversity in gifting, experience, and leadership. Strauch draws from passages like 1 Timothy 5:17 (honoring elders who lead well, especially in preaching/teaching) and the apostles' example (e.g., Peter's prominence among the Twelve) to describe a "first among equals" dynamic. This allows one elder (often the primary teacher or lead pastor) to lead functionally without creating a separate office or diminishing equality. It promotes humble servanthood, mutual accountability, and effective decision-making in a council of brothers.

Strauch emphasizes that this model protects the church from lone-ranger leadership, diffuses criticism, and fosters gospel-centered vulnerability and trust among leaders. It's not about power distribution for its own sake but about faithfully obeying Scripture's design for Christ's church.

With that foundation laid, the rest of this book walks through the practical, step-by-step process I've used and taught to others: from prayerful recruiting to rigorous assessment, customized conditions for growth, joyful installation, and ongoing leadership as a healthy plurality.

## Chapter 2: Where Do Elders Come From? Creating Spaces to Spot and Develop Potential Leaders

If you're a young pastor, church planter, or leader in a growing congregation, one of the first questions that hits you is: Where do I find elders? The biblical office is clear—qualified men who teach, shepherd, and oversee (1 Tim. 3; Titus 1)—but in the early days or in a revitalizing church, those men often aren't obvious. They may be quietly serving in the background, raising families, or even new to the faith themselves. The good news? God is already at work raising up shepherds in your midst. Our role isn't to manufacture them but to create environments where their gifts and character can be observed, nurtured, and tested over time.

The key is intentionality. Don't wait for a crisis or burnout to start looking—build pipelines and spaces proactively. Here are some practical ways to do that:

- **Pray and teach consistently on eldership.** Start here every time. Pray systematically for future elders (personally and congregationally), and preach through the biblical texts regularly. When people hear what Scripture actually says about elders—high calling, noble task (1 Tim. 3:1), plurality, shepherding heart—they begin to aspire or recognize it in others.
- **Observe in everyday ministry settings.** Look for shepherding qualities wherever men serve: small group leaders, Sunday school teachers, mercy ministry volunteers, hospitality hosts, or men who naturally care for others in crises. Ask: Does he teach clearly so people "get it"? Does he show empathy and genuine care? Do others follow and trust him? These organic environments reveal character without pressure.
- **Create discipleship and growth groups.** Start men's Bible studies, theology discussions, or leadership cohorts. These become natural "incubators" for potential leaders. Invite men who show interest or promise, and watch how they engage with Scripture, handle conflict, and encourage others.
- **Invest relationally one-on-one.** Spend time with promising men—meals, coffee, ride-alongs to visits. These moments build trust and let you see family life, marriage health, and personal maturity up close.

At Greenbriar, we formalized this through a structured 10-month leadership development cohort designed for men (and their wives) who show a desire for ministry leadership—whether future elders, deacons, planters, or faithful servants in other roles. We call it The 10 Cohort. It runs annually (e.g., August to May) and focuses on shaping biblical convictions, ministry philosophy, and practical skills.

The program centers on ten core competencies essential for church leaders:

1. Spiritual Vitality
2. Theological Clarity

3. Marriage and Family
4. Healthy Relationships
5. Godly Leadership
6. Spiritual Maturity
7. Missional Lifestyle
8. Disciple Making
9. Gospel Centrality
10. Calling

Each month dives into one competency with a primary resource (book, videos, articles) and homework. We meet twice monthly:

- A mid-month gathering at the church for discussion (mostly participant-led, based on the material).
- An end-of-month dinner hosted by a participating couple, where they facilitate discussion—testing hospitality, leadership, and relational warmth.

We cap it with a Spring retreat or conference for deeper fellowship and growth (spouses strongly encouraged). The final month on Calling is especially powerful. We schedule one-on-one meetings with each couple to help them discern God's direction: Is He calling this man to pursue eldership? To serve as a deacon? To continue volunteering faithfully in his current capacity? Or perhaps something else entirely? These conversations are gentle, prayerful, and resource-rich—we provide books, assessment tools, Scripture studies, and honest feedback based on what we've observed over the 10 months. Many men gain clarity and confidence; others step back with grace, knowing their gifts fit elsewhere. Either outcome strengthens the church.

This cohort isn't the only pipeline—adapt it to your context. Start small: a quarterly book club on eldership, a short theology series, or inviting a handful of men to read Strauch together. The goal is the same: create spaces where potential elders can grow, be seen, and be tested in community. Over time, qualified men emerge naturally—not rushed, not forced, but raised up by God through faithful investment.

When you invest like this upstream, recruiting specific elder candidates (next chapter) becomes far easier and more fruitful. You're not starting from scratch; you're building on ground already prepared.

## Chapter 3: Recruiting Potential Elders

Once you've built spaces and pipelines to develop leaders—like discipleship groups, theology cohorts, or our 10-month leadership program—you'll start noticing men who exhibit the qualities Scripture calls for in elders. But noticing isn't enough; recruiting requires intentional, prayerful pursuit. This chapter focuses on the active step of identifying and approaching potential elders, before diving into the more formal application process.

The foundation remains prayer. Legitimately pray for elders. Be honest: it's tempting to skip straight to strategy when you're stretched thin or the church needs help. But eldership is God's work. Develop systematic habits—perhaps a weekly prayer list of men in your congregation, dedicated fasting times, or incorporating elder-focused prayer into your personal and family devotions. More importantly, involve the congregation in praying for elders. Set aside specific times: corporate prayer meetings, small group prayer nights, or even an annual emphasis where the church prays together for God to raise up shepherds. When the body prays, God often stirs hearts and reveals the men He's preparing.

**Have a clear process ready before you recruit.** Document your steps (you can adapt the ones in this book). Equally vital: have clear expectations articulated upfront. A mature man will ask, “What does this actually look like?” Be kind by being clear—outline time commitments, shepherding duties, teaching responsibilities (if any), decision-making involvement, family implications, and ongoing character standards. Review these expectations periodically as your church matures.

One of the most powerful recruiting tools is teaching regularly on eldership. This isn't a one-off sermon; make it recurring. Preach expositively through 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9. Highlight the high, noble calling (1 Tim. 3:1): elders are pastors who teach sound doctrine, shepherd souls, and oversee the flock—not board members, CEOs, or honorary titles. When the congregation grasps the biblical vision, men aspire to it, families support it, and the church owns the process. Teaching demystifies eldership and helps filter out wrong motives early.

**Create environments to spend time with potential elders.** This builds on the pipelines from the previous chapter. Invite promising men into leadership cohorts, men's discipleship groups, or small groups you personally lead. These settings allow natural observation and investment. Be watchful for **shepherding qualities**:

- **Teaching ability:** Can he explain truth clearly? Do people understand and respond when he speaks?
- **Shepherding heart:** Does he show empathy? Is he quick to help, comfort, and care for others in need?
- **Leadership influence:** Do people naturally follow him? Do they trust his judgment and character?

Use 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 as your checklist—above reproach, faithful husband, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness or violence, gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, manages his household well, good reputation with outsiders, and more.

**Pre-assessment or introductory training** can help discern fit before formal steps. Offer resources to think through eldership: recommend books like Alexander Strauch's *Biblical Eldership*, sermons on the pastoral office, or a short questionnaire on qualifications and calling. This serves as gentle vetting—if a man engages superficially or drops off, it's often a sign to pause. For those who persist, it prepares their hearts and minds for what's ahead.

Recruiting is relational and Spirit-led. Approach men personally—over coffee, after a service, or during a walk—sharing what you've observed in their life and why you believe God might be calling them to consider eldership. Be honest about the joys and costs. Affirm their current faithfulness, and invite them to pray and explore further. Many men need encouragement to see themselves in that role.

Remember: go slow. The two ditches are waiting forever (risking burnout) or rushing (risking unqualified men). Better to move deliberately than hastily. When a man responds positively and leadership affirms, transition to the formal application stage (next chapter). Prayerful, patient recruiting honors God and protects the church.

## Chapter 4: The Application Process

With prayerful recruiting complete and a man expressing interest (or you having approached him with encouragement), it's time to move into the more formal application stage. This is where the process shifts from observation and invitation to serious, in-depth evaluation. We name this stage clearly: the man becomes an "Elder Applicant". This helps him (and the church) sense progression—it's not endless limbo, but a defined step toward a high, noble calling.

Before proceeding, ensure leadership is in full agreement. If you have other elders or trusted leaders, confirm everyone is aligned on moving this man forward. If you're the sole elder (common in planting or early stages), seek input from mature brothers in your network—they may know details or red flags you haven't seen. Unity here protects everyone.

A non-negotiable element: include the applicant's wife from the start. A man's wife can't qualify him for pastoral ministry, but she can disqualify him from ministry. They are one flesh (Gen. 2:24; Eph. 5:31), so if she harbors unresolved bitterness, resistance to the demands of eldership, unaddressed sin patterns, or a lack of support for his calling, it will inevitably affect his ability to lead with a clear conscience and undivided heart. It's far better to discover and address these realities early—through honest dialogue, counseling if needed—than to proceed and face ministry-derailing tensions later. Even if he has strong character and gifts on his own, a wife's unwillingness or ongoing struggles can undermine the household management qualification (1 Tim. 3:4–5; Titus 1:6) and the "above reproach" standard that extends to family life. Require her to complete a portion of the application—questions about her faith, marriage health, family dynamics, willingness to embrace the role's implications, and any concerns she has. We've seen applications reveal marital strains or personal issues that weren't apparent in casual interactions. Do not compromise on this step; it's protective for the family, the applicant, and the church.

This stage demands time—several weeks to months, sometimes longer. Eldership is a biblical office, not a casual volunteer role or board position. Treat it with the gravity it deserves. Use the application to help the applicant sense a true calling to the ministry received in the Lord (Colossians 4:17). Emphasize that elders are shepherds who teach, protect, and oversee—not administrators or figureheads. The process itself should communicate seriousness.

The application should be thorough and pointed. Cover key areas to uncover character, doctrine, and life patterns. While exact questions vary by church, common categories include:

- **Christian experience and calling:** Testimony of salvation, current walk with Christ, sense of calling to eldership, recent growth or repentance.
- **Doctrine and theology:** Views on core truths (gospel, Scripture, salvation, church ordinances, etc.), ability to articulate key doctrines clearly.

- **Personal character and qualifications:** Honest self-assessment against 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9 (above reproach, faithful in marriage, temperate, hospitable, able to teach, not quarrelsome, manages household well, etc.). Include pointed questions on money, debt, sexuality, pornography, anger, addictions, or hidden sins.
- **Marriage and family:** Relationship health, parenting, spouse's support (her section here).
- **Ministry and leadership:** Past service, gifts, strengths/weaknesses, how he handles conflict or discouragement.
- **Honesty clause:** End with a question like, “Are all the answers in this application true and complete?” This has led men to confess hidden sin during the process—a merciful exposure before installation.

The depth of these questions signals importance. Applicants often report it forces serious reflection and prayer. We've had men repent and grow through filling it out alone.

Once submitted, review with current leadership. If red flags emerge, address them graciously—perhaps pause, counsel, or redirect. If all affirms moving forward, transition to assessment (next chapter). This application phase is a mercy: it digs deeply, protects the church from hasty decisions, and helps the applicant count the cost of a serious calling.

Go slow here. Rushing undermines the gravity; thoroughness builds trust and health.

If you're finding the full process—from recruiting through assessment and installation—daunting to build from scratch, or if you'd like to walk through customizing these steps for your church context, I offer coaching for pastors and planters who are developing elders. Over the years I've refined documents, assessment tools, sample letters, grading worksheets, and expectations templates that have helped many churches implement healthy, biblical eldership. If that would be helpful, feel free to reach out—I'm happy to talk through what might serve your team best. No pressure; just resources born out of real experience to support the work God's calling you to do.

## Chapter 5: Assessments and Conditions

Once the application is complete, leadership has reviewed it, and there is unified agreement to proceed, the applicant moves into the assessment phase. This is the most intensive part of the process—deep, multi-perspective evaluation of the man's life, character, marriage, ministry, and calling. The goal is not to interrogate or disqualify unnecessarily, but to serve the applicant and the church by confirming whether God has truly called and equipped him for eldership.

### **Build an assessment team.**

Ideally, form a team of at least three men (we've used four on occasion). This could include current elders, yourself as lead pastor, and—if your team is small—trusted brothers from outside (e.g., from a network like Acts 29). Multiple eyes bring reliability: each person adds perspective, reduces blind spots, and increases confidence in the outcome. If you don't yet have enough elders to form a team internally, lean on network relationships. Many pastors are willing to help assess because they've been through similar processes themselves. Benefits include:

- Greater confidence for the applicant ("A group of pastors has vetted me").
- Greater confidence for the congregation ("Outside eyes have looked deeply").
- Greater confidence for you as lead pastor ("I didn't miss something alone").
- Exposure of your own blind spots through fresh perspectives.
- Training for your future elders (they learn by participating).
- Building brotherhood across the wider church.

Even with one or two elders, adding one external assessor can make a strong team.

### **Equip the team.**

Provide them with the application, any pre-assessment materials, and tools like a grading worksheet (covering seven key areas of life and ministry—character, doctrine, marriage/family, leadership, etc.). The best equipping comes through practice: new elders often join as observers or participants after their own assessment, learning both sides of the process.

### **Prepare for the interview.**

Schedule a dedicated time (ideally 2–2.5 hours max—longer becomes counterproductive due to fatigue). Create a non-anxious environment: comfortable room, coffee/water/snacks, and upfront reassurance that this is not an inquisition—there's no one to impress, nothing to prove. Some teams go off-site for a day or two (lake house, cabin) to observe natural interactions and nuances. Meet as a team beforehand (an hour prior or a day earlier) to discuss observed/potential weaknesses, agree on key questions, divide them among members, and create a loose flow. Focus on gentleness, kindness, and empathy—this is service to the applicant.

**The interview itself.**

Meet with the applicant and his wife together. Ask into strengths, weaknesses, application answers, marriage dynamics, hidden struggles, doctrinal clarity, and ministry vision. Be direct but loving. Listen well. Take breaks if needed. Avoid giving final decisions on the spot—tell them you'll debrief and follow up soon.

**Debrief immediately after.**

The team discusses impressions, fills out any grading tools, and answers: Do we still affirm their strengths? What new concerns surfaced? Collective thoughts?

**Assessment outcomes.**

The team reaches one of several conclusions:

- Yes: Qualified and called—proceed to candidate phase (often with conditions).
- Yes, but with conditions: Strong overall, but specific areas need growth before installation.
- Not yet: Significant issues to address; conditions required before reconsideration.
- No, not right now: Major concerns; possible future reassessment after time and growth.
- No, never: Rare, but occurs if disqualifying issues are unresolvable.

If the outcome is "Yes" or "Yes with conditions," move to the candidate phase.

**Conditions and training.**

Every candidate should have customized conditions—tailored growth plans to strengthen weaknesses while pursuing the office. This reflects the aspiration to grow spiritually alongside aspiring to lead. The assessment team collaborates to recommend conditions based on worksheets and interview insights. Examples include:

- Marriage/individual counseling.
- Creating a family discipleship plan.
- Reading specific books with one-page summaries.
- Listening to sermons/podcasts on theology or shepherding.
- Taking a theology course.
- Developing a budget and debt-reduction plan.
- Wife connecting with other pastors' wives for support and insight.

Appoint a point person/coach from the team to walk with the candidate—answering questions, checking progress, offering encouragement. This is a mentoring relationship.

**Formal communication.**

Send a thoughtful letter to the candidate (and wife) outlining:

- Affirmed strengths.
- Observed areas for growth.
- Specific conditions with timelines (could take months to a year+).
- Who the coach is.
- Encouragement that this is about helping them thrive in calling.

### **Congregational communication.**

Churches are governed a bit differently—some operate with strong congregational input throughout the process (e.g., early nominations or surveys from members), while others reserve public presentation until the elders have fully affirmed the candidate. Think this through clearly and operate according to your church's bylaws, constitution, or established procedures. In our experience, it's wise to delay bringing a man before the congregation until all conditions are met and the assessment team has unanimous agreement to install him. We once made the mistake of presenting a potential elder early in the process—asking the congregation if anyone had reason he shouldn't even enter the elder track. At that point, we were still exploring and open to feedback. However, after deeper assessment and interviews, we became uncomfortable proceeding further. This created awkwardness: the congregation wondered what happened to him, the applicant felt exposed and potentially shamed, and the whole situation caused unnecessary confusion. Avoid that ditch by holding off on public announcements until you're confident. If your governance requires early congregational input (like a survey, nomination period, or opportunity for objections), build that in upfront—perhaps a brief, private feedback window for members after nomination but before full assessment—or clarify in teaching that the elders handle vetting thoroughly before any public affirmation vote. The key is clarity and consistency: communicate the process transparently so the church knows what to expect and why certain steps happen when they do. This honors the congregation's role in recognizing elders while protecting everyone involved from unnecessary pain.

### **Final check-in.**

After conditions are fulfilled, hold a relaxed final interview (perhaps lunch or dinner with the couple). Celebrate progress, offer final encouragement, and—if needed—add minor adjustments. This is a moment of joy and confirmation.

The assessment and conditions phase is rigorous by design. It protects the church, honors the office, and often produces profound growth in the candidate. Go slow—better a longer process than a rushed regret.

# Chapter 6: Installation, Ordination, and Leading as a Plurality

After conditions are met, the assessment team has unanimously affirmed the candidate, and any final check-in has confirmed readiness, the joyful culmination arrives: installation (and ordination, if applicable). This is not merely an administrative step—it is a public, celebratory affirmation of God's call on a man's life and the church's recognition of him as one of its shepherds.

## Ordination vs. Installation

If the man has not previously been ordained as a minister of the gospel, this service serves as both ordination and installation. Conduct it during a Sunday gathering with the congregation as witnesses. Present him with a Certificate of Ordination (signed on the back by the assessment team and current elders), and make clear that this is a formal recognition of his calling and qualification. If he has already been ordained elsewhere (e.g., from a previous ministry role), the service is installation only—no new ordination certificate is needed. Simply communicate that he is being installed as an elder/pastor among the plurality.

## Make this day a big deal

Eldership is a biblical office of high honor and responsibility. The congregation needs to *feel* its weight and significance. This event builds credibility for the new elder, strengthens trust in the leadership structure, and reminds everyone of the church's commitment to Scripture's design for leadership. Promote the service well in advance—announce it multiple weeks ahead, encourage full attendance, and frame it as a family celebration. Consider a reception or celebration lunch afterward. Invite any external assessors who helped (if schedules allow). Include the elder's wife meaningfully but sensitively. Have her stand with him as elders lay hands on him and pray over him during the service. This honors her partnership and the reality that eldership affects the whole family. Avoid putting her in the spotlight (e.g., no public speaking or formal prayer) if it would add unnecessary pressure.

## Elements of the service

Use this moment as a live teaching opportunity—don't miss it. Preach a sermon (or include one) that reinforces biblical eldership:

- What an elder is not (CEO, board member, lone ranger).
- What an elder is (shepherd, teacher, overseer; servant-leader under Christ).
- The role of the congregation (to submit to, pray for, and follow godly elders).
- The beauty and necessity of a plurality of elders (shared authority, mutual accountability, diverse gifting).

Allow 7–15 minutes for the new elder to share a brief testimony of his calling. Hearing his own words builds connection and credibility with the congregation. Other thoughtful touches:

- Present gifts (e.g., a pastor's Bible, LOGOS software, a personal note from the team, something meaningful for his wife).
- Have current elders lay hands on him while praying for faithfulness, wisdom, and joy in shepherding.
- End with a congregational affirmation or vote (per your bylaws) to recognize him publicly.

### **Leading as a Plurality of Elders**

Installation marks the beginning of true shared leadership. The New Testament consistently presents elders in the plural—never a solo senior pastor with assistants, but a team of qualified men leading together (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Philippians 1:1). Alexander Strauch's *Biblical Eldership* captures this well: all elders share equal authority in the office, yet there is functional leadership ("first among equals") based on gifting, experience, and the need for clear direction.

As lead pastor, embrace your role as **first among equals**. The buck stops with you—not because of superior rank, but because leadership requires someone to lead humbly and decisively. This dynamic fosters accountability, prevents paralysis, and models servant-hearted authority.

### **Establish healthy rhythms**

Set consistent meeting times based on availability. For example:

- Full elder council: monthly (e.g., second Friday at 6 a.m.) for shepherding, doctrine, and major decisions.
- Overseeing/staff elders: weekly for day-to-day operations and strategy.

Use agendas or templates to keep meetings focused and purposeful. As the team grows, distinguish between full-council shepherding/doctrine and a smaller executive team for operations (always including the lead pastor).

### **Set clear expectations**

Clarity is kindness—restate them before installation and revisit periodically. General expectations apply to all elders (e.g., personal holiness, shepherding assigned members, attending meetings, modeling gospel humility). Staff elders need role-specific ones; lay elders leading ministries need tailored clarity too.

### **Build real relationships**

Elders are not just colleagues—they are brothers. Invest in friendship: retreats, shared meals, home visits, conferences (with wives invited). Create regular spaces for transparency and vulnerability—monthly accountability worksheets help confess sin, fight temptation, and live above reproach. Include wives and families in fun, non-work gatherings (e.g., monthly dinners with kids). These bonds build trust, which is essential for plurality to function.

One practice that has been a tremendous blessing at Greenbriar is our monthly elder family gatherings. Once a month, all the elders, their wives, and kids come together—no agenda other than

to enjoy one another's company. We take turns hosting, often grilling out together, sharing meals, playing games, or just letting the kids run around while the adults talk and laugh. These times are intentionally light and relational—no business discussions, no elder meeting spillover. They remind us that we're family first, brothers and sisters in Christ serving together. The wives connect deeply (often sharing the unique joys and challenges of ministry life), the kids build friendships across families, and the whole group grows in genuine affection and support. In a role that can feel isolating at times, these gatherings recharge us, foster vulnerability in a low-pressure way, and strengthen the unity that makes plurality sustainable and joyful.

We've also gone on elder retreats together with our wives. These getaways—typically once or twice a year—provide concentrated time away from daily ministry demands to pray, reflect, plan vision for the church, and simply rest and reconnect. Bringing the wives along has been key: it acknowledges that eldership impacts the whole family, allows the women to build their own supportive relationships, and creates space for shared encouragement in the unique pressures of pastoral life. We've seen these retreats deepen trust among the brothers, renew marriages, and refresh our collective calling—often through unstructured fellowship, intentional prayer times, and even light-hearted activities. Whether a simple overnight at a nearby cabin or a more structured weekend, including spouses turns what could be just "business" into genuine family renewal for the leadership team.

### **Shepherding, teaching, and overseeing**

Every elder should engage all three biblical responsibilities to some degree, but lean into gifting: one may focus primarily on teaching, another on shepherding care, another on oversight. Use frameworks like prophet-priest-king to discern primary giftings and allocate time accordingly.

### **Communicate plurality to the church**

Congregations often default to seeing the lead pastor as "the" pastor and others as assistants. Counter this intentionally:

- Introduce yourself publicly as "one of the pastors/elders."
- Ensure all elders do the same when leading or speaking.
- Feature elders (and wives) equally on the website, announcements, and teaching.
- Teach repeatedly on plurality—use installation services as illustrations.

True plurality requires giving away real authority and control. If you say "plurality" but always make unilateral decisions, it becomes lip service. Handle power-sharing with wisdom, but embrace it as obedience to Scripture.

### **Lead pastor pastors the pastors**

Your primary role shifts: you shepherd your fellow elders. Love them, support them, ask hard questions about their marriages, families, and souls. Be the "chief repenter"—model confession and grace. Regularly ask, "Do you have everything you need to do what God has called you to?" This care sustains the team and models gospel culture for the whole church.

Installation is celebration; plurality is ongoing joy and burden-sharing. When done biblically, it protects leaders from isolation, diffuses criticism, and equips the church to flourish under Christ's headship.

# Chapter 7: Bylaws, Team Structure, and Ongoing Practices

With installation complete and the new elder integrated into the team, attention turns to the structural and ongoing elements that sustain healthy eldership over time. These practices—rooted in Scripture and refined through experience—ensure clarity, accountability, and longevity.

## Bylaws and Governance Essentials

Your church bylaws should clearly reflect biblical eldership to avoid confusion or conflict later. Key elements to include:

- **Definition of elders:** Shepherd-leaders (also called pastors/overseers) who teach, shepherd, and oversee the flock.
- **Biblical qualifications:** Full listing from 1 Timothy 3:1–7 and Titus 1:5–9, with emphasis on character, family life, and ability to teach.
- **Structure:** Plurality of elders operating as first among equals, with the lead pastor functionally leading while all share equal authority in the office.
- **Selection, training, and assessment process:** Outline the steps (recruiting, application, assessment teams, conditions, etc.) as described in this book.
- **Installation/ordination:** How new elders are publicly recognized and affirmed.
- **Plurality in leadership:** How elders lead together (meetings, decision-making, shepherding).
- **Accusations and discipline:** Procedures for addressing concerns or sin among elders (e.g., Matthew 18 process, involving other elders or the congregation as needed).
- **Removal of elders:** Grounds for stepping down or removal (e.g., disqualification, burnout, health, family needs, or unrepentant sin).
- **Elder tenure:** No automatic rotation or term limits—elders serve indefinitely as long as they remain qualified, willing, and able to fulfill the role. (More on this below.)

Review and update bylaws periodically to align with Scripture and your church's growth. Clear bylaws provide a guardrail for unity and protect against power struggles.

## Elder Team Size and Function

How many elders do you need? It depends on your church size, expectations, and shepherding model. At Greenbriar, we aim for roughly one elder per 40 members, as we assign members (or small groups) to specific elders for pastoral care. This ratio allows meaningful shepherding without overload. If all elders participate in every decision, teams larger than 5 can slow things down (paralysis by analysis). When the team grows beyond that, consider a smaller overseeing/executive team (3–4 elders, including the lead pastor/first among equals) for day-to-day operations, while keeping the full council for shepherding, doctrine, and major matters. The smaller team communicates transparently with the full group to maintain unity.

### **Ratio of Lay Elders vs. Staff Elders**

Scripture is silent on paid vs. unpaid ratios—wisdom and prayer guide this. Some churches prioritize more lay elders for accountability; others have more staff for operational needs. Follow what best serves your context and any external audit requirements (if applicable). The focus remains on qualification and gifting, not compensation.

### **Assigning Members to Elders for Pastoral Care**

One effective way to embody plurality in shepherding is assigning members to specific elders. At Greenbriar, each member (or small group) is linked to an elder who serves as their primary pastor for care—available for counseling, weddings, funerals, check-ins, emergencies, etc. We use metaphors like "family physician" (proactive check-ins via calls/texts) and "first responders" (small group steps in for urgent needs, with elders ultimately pastoring through it). Elders typically oversee 2–4 small groups based on capacity and gifting. This distributes the load, ensures no one falls through cracks, and lets members experience plurality personally. Reassignments happen naturally (e.g., group changes), and we maintain an "elder at large" for those not in groups.

### **Advisory Team or Advisory Board**

Consider an advisory team (often deacons or trusted members) for financial oversight, resources, or accountability. Appoint them as trustees/treasurer per bylaws, with clear expectations: they advise but hold no governing authority over elders. This keeps elders above reproach in stewardship while freeing them for spiritual leadership.

### **Ongoing Culture and Transparency**

Eldership thrives in a gospel culture of transparency and vulnerability. As lead pastor/first among equals, be the "chief repenter"—confess sins openly, admit temptations, and create space for brothers to do the same without judgment. Monthly accountability worksheets facilitate this, prompting honest reflection on marriage, family, personal holiness, and ministry pressures. This culture permeates the team and, through example, the church. It builds trust, guards against hidden sin, and models grace. Keep plurality before the congregation: introduce all elders as "one of the pastors," feature them equally in communications, and teach on it often.

### **Elder Tenure and Renewal**

We do not rotate elders off on a scheduled basis, as some churches do. Scripture presents eldership as a calling to an office, not a temporary board position (1 Tim. 3:1; Acts 20:28). A man remains an elder as long as he meets the qualifications, is willing and able to serve, and no disqualifying issues arise (burnout, health concerns, family needs, or sin). To provide built-in grace and flexibility, we re-sign an elder covenant every other year, aligned with our whole church renewing their partnership covenant. This annual church partnership renewal (a recommitment to membership, doctrine, and mission) includes elders re-affirming their specific elder covenant—pledging to uphold qualifications, responsibilities, and unity. This bi-annual renewal serves several purposes:

- It offers a natural, non-shaming opportunity for an elder to step back temporarily if needed (e.g., for rest, family season, or reevaluation) without implying failure or disqualification.
- It reinforces accountability—elders (and the team) reflect on ongoing faithfulness.
- It keeps the covenant fresh and intentional, preventing drift.

We don't force rotations or automatic sabbaticals; service continues indefinitely unless the elder or team discerns otherwise. This honors the lifelong calling aspect while providing merciful off-ramps. If an elder steps away, he can often continue serving the church in other ways, and the door remains open for future return if circumstances change.

In addition to this renewal rhythm, we have provision for sabbaticals every 7 years for staff elders (full-time paid roles), drawing from the biblical pattern of extended rest modeled in Scripture (e.g., the Sabbath principle in Exodus 20 and the seventh-year fallow land in Leviticus 25). These sabbaticals allow for deeper renewal, reflection, family investment, and spiritual refreshment—often 1–3 months, depending on needs and planning. We are open to extending similar sabbatical opportunities to lay elders if the need arises (e.g., significant burnout, health, or family demands), handled case-by-case through team discernment and church support. The goal is long-term sustainability: protecting elders from exhaustion so they can shepherd faithfully for the long haul.

These structural and cultural elements create a stable, biblical framework for eldership. They protect the team, serve the flock, and glorify Christ as the true Head of His church.

## Chapter 8: Embracing the Gift of Biblical Eldership

Developing elders is not just about filling leadership roles—it's about faithfully obeying Scripture's design for Christ's church. From prayerful recruiting and intentional pipelines like our leadership cohort, through rigorous application and assessment, to joyful installation and the ongoing rhythms of plurality, the process we've walked through in this book is one we've lived at Greenbriar Church. It began with a significant shift in 2012, moved through mistakes and stumbles, and has become one of the greatest graces God has given our congregation: a team of trusted brothers sharing the load, shepherding together, and leading with mutual accountability and joy.

The journey isn't always easy. It requires patience, humility, transparency, and a willingness to go slow for the sake of long-term health. But when elders are raised up biblically—qualified in character, called by God, and united in plurality—the church thrives. Burnout decreases, blind spots are covered, the flock is better cared for, and Christ is more clearly honored as the true Head.

If you're a pastor or planter reading this and thinking, "This sounds right, but where do I even start implementing it in my context?"—you're not alone. Many leaders feel the weight of building healthy eldership from scratch. Over the years, I've walked with dozens of pastors through customizing these steps: refining processes, adapting documents, navigating transitions, and troubleshooting common pitfalls. We have a full set of practical tools—sample applications, assessment worksheets, condition letters, elder covenants, expectations documents, and more—that have helped churches move from theory to healthy plurality.

If that kind of tailored coaching would serve you or your team, I'd be glad to talk it through. You can find more details and ways to connect at [www.egcoaching.org](http://www.egcoaching.org). No pressure—just resources and conversation born from real experience, aimed at helping you raise up godly shepherds for the glory of Christ and the good of His church.

May the Lord raise up elders in your midst, sustain your team in plurality, and use you to equip the saints until He returns.

Thank you for reading. Press on in the work He's called you to.