

# Notes on Oversight Structure

## 1. Words used to describe an Elder

1 Peter 5

The **elders** who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow **elder** and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: <sup>2</sup> **Shepherd** the flock of God which is among you, serving as **overseers**, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; <sup>3</sup> nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; <sup>4</sup> and when the Chief **Shepherd** appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

*This passage from Peter shows that the three words (both in Greek and English), used as either nouns or verbs, are interchangeable in terms of function.*

**Elder** - presbuteros

**Overseer** - episkopos

**Shepherd** - poimēn

*This pattern is repeated in Paul's speech, as reported by Luke in Acts*

Acts 20

<sup>17</sup> From Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called for the **elders** of the church.

<sup>28</sup> Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you **overseers**, to **shepherd** the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

*In some translations of the Bible, these Greek words may be translated differently.*

1 Timothy 3

This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a **bishop** <sup>NKJV</sup>, he desires a good work. <sup>2</sup> A **bishop** then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;

There is a footnote in NKJV, <sup>NKJV</sup> Literally: overseer

Philippians 1

Paul and Timothy, bondservants of Jesus Christ,

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the **bishops** and deacons:

<sup>2</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 4

<sup>11</sup> And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some **pastors** and teachers, <sup>12</sup> for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ,

## At NLCC

You will often hear reference to the elders, the elders meetings or the oversight. These are all the same term.

We tend to use the term pastor to refer to those elders who have specific pastoral (spiritual care) responsibilities, or to reflect how we use time (today I did pastoral visits vs. prepared a sermon) but this is a reflection of how we speak, and not a differentiation amongst the elders.

## 2. Plural vs. Singular

*The majority of the references to elders are in the plural. Two exceptions are:*

- *Qualifications of an elder in Timothy and Titus, where it is logical to structure a sentence, “an elder should...”*
- *John’s letters, which have long been the subject of debate.*

*The bulk of references in Acts and the letters are to elders. With the exception of John, there are no references to a single elder at a church and there is no reference to a senior or chief amongst elders. Note this applies to the term in general (overseer, elder, pastor, bishop).*

*Against this weight of scripture in favour of elders plural, it is common to find a senior pastor or equivalently named minister in a local church. Comment on some of the texts which may appear to support this is therefore given:*

Matthew 16

<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

<sup>17</sup> Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.

<sup>18</sup> And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of *Hades shall not prevail against it.*

*The rock is the confession, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”, not Peter. All Protestants would presumably agree with this interpretation.*

*At different times in Acts, various ones seem to take a lead: Peter in Acts 5:3, Peter in Acts 15:7, James in Acts 15:13, Paul and James in Acts 21:8. However, there is no consistent leader. Indeed, when Paul and Barnabus could not agree in Acts 15:36-41 there was not seniority structure to resolve the conflict.*

### **At NLCC**

We are elders together with the same authority. We have differing gifts, abilities, callings and experience of the Lord. However, we meet as equals in terms of ruling. From time to time, one or more may take the lead on a specific issue and others acknowledge that.

All decisions on the oversight are made in unity by one of two methods:

- For most decisions, we work by majority. We never vote: in practice, this means that those who do not positively support an idea chose not to prevent a decision going forward.
- For major decision, or where a point of principle or doctrine is involved, we do not move forward until we all positively agree. In practice, this means any elder can hold up any decision until they feel comfortable to allow it to go forward or until others come to their point of view. This does not happen often, but it enables each of us to be sensitive to the Spirit and delay a course of action if they think it needs more consideration.