

On Serving and Leading

[the vision and hope for dcf leadership]

With Scripture as our guide, the DCF elders desire to better clarify how our church is led and served. Several realities make this process difficult. First, the models of church leadership are numerous, and there is no doubt that our past experience and the ways we have grown accustomed to viewing Scripture sometimes hinder attempts at a fresh reading. Second, try as we might like to resist such influence, culture shapes us. Whether it is Christian culture (and a particular view of church governance) or the broader culture (and some view of political democracy), it is always a challenge to allow Scripture to live and breathe on its own terms.

We face yet another challenge whenever we dig into Scripture written to a particular context now 2,000 years removed. This digging and applying is a nuanced task. We have to ask questions like: *Is what Scripture offers in this place a picture of what was taking place in that context, or is it an admonition for what should take place in every context?* For instance, Paul seems to indicate that as a result of particular concerns within the Corinthian culture, all the women who prayed in public worship should do so with some sort of head covering.¹ Our view is that this admonition is intended for a particular time and context, not a prescription for how all women in all churches across all time should worship. However, Paul rebuked the same Corinthian church for allowing gross, public sexual infidelity to take place among two who were committed participants in their community. Our view is that this teaching is an example of immoral behavior Paul intends us to rebuke in every church community in every context.

As a result, it is with both clarity and a fair dose of humility that we offer our findings. We do not suggest that where we land is the only appropriate way for a church to govern itself and lead its community. In fact, it is best to conclude with Millard Erickson that “the evidence from the New Testament is inconclusive; nowhere in the New Testament do we find a picture closely resembling any of the fully developed systems of today...There may well have been rather wide varieties of governmental arrangements. Each church adopted a pattern that fit its individual situation.”² This then is our best attempt, where we are now, to be faithful to Scripture as it lives itself out in our particular communal context.

[a few foundations]

The servant-leaders of dcf are not in place to manhandle all ministry that flows out of our community. We are not the professional few who perform all the efforts while the rest of the community looks on, an unhealthy though prevalent paradigm in the modern church. Though we most certainly struggle with this pervasive notion, we desire to speak against it, loud and clear. In the spirit of Ephesians 4, our role is to equip our entire community to live out its calling, passions and service. If the influence DCF has and the Christ-life we offer is only as meager as what a small

¹ There is good possibility that particular social issues were at play in Corinthian culture where certain hair and dress styles had strong contemporary association with sexualized pagan worship or lewd sexual behavior (*NIV Application Commentary*).

² Erickson, Millard, *Systematic Theology*, p. 1094.

numbered band of leaders offer, we are in a miserable plight indeed. The ministry is your ministry, and it is our job to call you to it. We hope to do just that.

The model of church leadership we follow is an elder-led model. This model is by no means unusual. It is similar to the Presbyterian form of church government. From our vantage point, we do not think the New Testament prescribes an entire church community voting on questions of spiritual direction or ongoing management. Our best understanding is that the healthiest form of leadership is to have a small group of spiritually in-tune leaders who, together, are the final authority of the church.³ So, this model would be distinct from a democratic model where everyone "has a vote" as well as from an autocratic model where a single position or personality has ultimate decision-making responsibility. This does not mean that individual opinions are unimportant or that in varying scenarios and contexts, the elder team does not (or will not) rely on others to help us understand God's leading. DCF elders have a very keen desire and responsibility to hear from those we lead, to know your hearts, to meet you in your struggles and questions, and to lead in ways that represent the kind, gentle (and, at times, firm) heart of our Shepherd, Jesus. Yet, in the end, the final authority within our community rests with the elders.

DCF has multiple groups of leaders: elders, pastors, staff, deacons and ministry teams. Each of these is vital to our mission, but (again) it should never be interpreted that all ministry flowing out of our church needs to originate or be led from within one of these groups. We are an alive, organic church. You are the church. Live your passion. Serve those around you. Give yourself away.

[elders]

The elder team at DCF is entrusted with the final authority in our church. Their primary purpose is not to manage all the affairs of the church, but to serve as spiritual overseers.⁴ The elders pray for our church, seek God's direction for our family, handle disputes within our community, address appropriate spiritual correction, deal with issues of Biblical faithfulness and guide us through any issue related to the overall spiritual climate of our church.

The qualifications from I Timothy 3 for an elder/overseer are⁵:

- one who is not marked as one with poor character
- if married, faithful in that covenant relationship
- not ruled by extremes
- able to control passions
- respected by others
- relational and hospitable (the Message reads "accessible")
- able to teach (the Message reads "must know what he's talking about")
- not a drunkard

³ "It should be noted, however, that the term elder...usually occurs in the plural, suggesting that the authority of the elders is collective rather than individual." Erickson, p. 1085.

⁴ Many versions translate the word for "elder" as "overseer" in I Timothy 3.

⁵ It is important to refrain from coming to these qualifications as a "checklist" whereby someone is always entirely in or entirely out. Certainly, perfection in any qualification is not what Paul is aiming for, and there are moments along the way when any one of us may fall short of the standard. It seems what Paul is moving us toward is both an assessment of overall character and wisdom as well as a standard by which to judge when we fall short, thus encouraging us toward the responsibility of the ministry role God has called us to.

- gentle rather than manipulative
- one who doesn't bicker (the Message reads "thin-skinned")
- not greedy
- if there is a family, good leadership is evidenced there
- not a new believer
- good reputation by those outside the community

Elders are chosen by a consensus among the current elder team. In fact, most decisions (and certainly any major ones) progress only with a consensus.

[deacons]

The word *deacon* means "servant." The Greek word can be used in numerous contexts with differing shades of meaning. Often, it is a general word to denote a spirit of service to the Church body. In Acts 6, however, and in several places within the Pastoral Epistles, *deacon* refers to a particular role, the office of the recognized servant. The genesis of the deacon was in the earliest days of the church as some of the practical outworking of ministry (in Acts 6, it was the caring for the Hellenistic widows) was falling through the cracks. The apostles who were responsible for the primary teaching and overall spiritual direction of the communities found they did not have the time and resources to make sure the many efforts of the church's vision and calling were being lived out. To remedy this, deacons were chosen to do this ministry work. No particular job description is given to deacons. However, the examples we have of deacon ministry pieced together with the qualifications for deacon service offer a wide range of possible ways of serving. In fact, it does seem appropriate to conclude that "Paul did not associate any fixed duties with the office of deacons. The implication is that deacons served as assistants to the overseers under their leadership and direction. They are supporting, relieving officers."⁶ Philip and Stephen are both named deacons in Acts 6 (to serve tables) but are subsequently both preaching and serving as evangelists.⁷ For DCF, then, deacons, are servants of spiritual character and maturity who are called out from the community to follow the spiritual direction of the elders and lead in numerous and varied ministry initiatives.

The qualifications from I Timothy 3 for a deacon are:

- respected by others
- serious about serious matters
- honest
- not a drunkard
- serving in order to give rather than in order to get
- steadfast to the core truths of our faith
- tested character
- if married, faithful in that covenant relationship
- if there is a family, good leadership is evidenced there
- not gossips
- trustworthy

⁶ Acts 6:1f is commonly used as a defining text for presenting us the office of a deacon; however, this passage does not specifically call these chosen servants "deacon," but rather describes the work being done, the service..

⁷ Acts 7 (Stephen) and Acts 8 (Philip).

In our setting, deacons are often recommended by other deacons. The final decision for inviting someone to be a deacon, however, rests with the elders. Deacons are a wide and diverse group. The spiritual maturity evidenced as well as the spiritual leadership required for any particular deacon may widely vary depending on the form of ministry pursued. However, the common denominator is that all who are deacons are responsible to carry out their ministry as an act of *spiritual* service to the Church body. They are not merely called to tasks. They are called to exhibit spiritual leadership within the context of fleshing out their God-given service. For some, the spiritual leadership one is entrusted with will be more intensive than for others. However, this will be a result of recognizing individual gifting and the demands of the area of ministry they will be undertaking for the church.

Deacons at DCF are comprised of: *house church leaders* (serving with the gifts of leadership, shepherding, teaching) and *deacons who lead areas of ministry that require deacon-type leadership* (serving with gifts of service, administration, help; public worship leading; children's ministry, etc.). This list is by no means exhaustive.

[pastors]

At DCF, pastors are a subset of elders. All pastors are elders, but all elders are not pastors. Reflecting the various "gifts given to the churches" in Ephesians 4, pastors are ones who are given primary responsibility (under the authority of the broader elder team) of day-by-day leadership of the church. This would include teaching, shepherding, visioning and pastoral direction. The current reality is that pastors at DCF are those who sense a vocational call to pastoral ministry, but this is certainly not a theological conviction. Further, other elders at DCF might well exhibit pastoral gifts without sensing a call to pastoral life and leadership.

[staff]

DCF also has staff who are paid to serve the broader community. This role requires spiritual maturity and gifting suitable to the area they are hired to lead. Vocational pastors at DCF would be considered staff, but there are also staff positions that would not be pastoral (for instance, an office administrator).

[ministry leaders/teams]

DCF also has numerous ministry leaders and ministry teams who serve the church community. These teams require commitment, time and a sense of ownership over the vision God has given DCF. Examples of these teams would be our technology group, the band, greeters and other outreach/service groups.

DCF desires to be a community of passionate God-worshippers who are enflamed with passion for God, one another and the world. May we lead in such a way.