

Elders Role at Jacob's Well

Reflections on Governance

Jacob's Well Church is a community that is functionally led by its staff, empowered by and operating under the authority of the board of elders. This document seeks to define the purpose, spirit, responsibilities, qualifications, roles, and rhythm of the board of elders.

Purpose

The board of elders of Jacob's Well Church oversee and steward the community towards the fulfillment of our identity to be a community whose life is entwined with God. In Jesus Christ, we show up, we share, we risk, we are transformed, and we act, following him and learning to walk in his ways. To that end the elders are consistently engaged in the process of shepherding, community development, spiritual discernment, and organizational governance.

Spirit

Those who are called to serve on the board of elders for Jacob's Well Church do so out of the following primary motivations:

- 1) Obedience – An elder serving on the Jacob's Well board does so out of a sense of calling from God. This calling is discerned through a process of prayer, observation, and conversation involving the current board of elders and the potential elder. Thus when an potential elder accepts the invitation to serve on the board, they are doing so as an act of obedience to God and the community, in keeping with an unfolding understanding of their calling.¹
- 2) Discipleship – Serving on the board of elders is not primarily an administrative task. While it includes administrative functions, the role of an elder is primarily one of spiritual discernment. The elder's role is one that should facilitate and enhance, not hinder, each participant's growth as a discipleship of Jesus Christ. What is true of the leadership of the church is true of the church itself. In that sense the board of elders function as a microcosm of the whole organism. Therefore we are motivated to disciple one another and behave in a way that is consistent who we believe we are as followers of Jesus Christ.
- 3) Stewardship – The board of elders understand that it is part of their responsibility to recognize the different resources that God has made available to the community for the purposes of participating in the work of building God's kingdom. Those resources are varied and many, but most often are manifested in people, ideas, opportunities, finances, and physical structures. The board of elders seek to wisely and generously steward the

¹ 1 Timothy 3:1 – “Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an elder (overseer) desires a noble task.”

resources God has supplied in keeping with our core identity, our calling, and our commitments.²

Qualifications

The elder board is self-perpetuating and seeks to discern from the community at large women and men who exhibit the following characteristics that commend them for a role in the elder community.

- 1) Character – To be an elder is to assume responsibility on behalf of the community as a servant of God. Such a role requires maturity, perspective, and integrity. Giving a person spiritual oversight responsibilities before they are mature enough to handle them is detrimental to the community, the board, and the person him or herself.³ Scripture teaches that those called to be elders are to be mature disciples of Jesus Christ whose lives bear the fruit and gifts of the Spirit.⁴ That is not to say that the elders of the Jacob’s Well will not struggle with sin.⁵ That is a given. However, the trajectory of the lives of elders in our community is that of growing obedience and submission to God and his ways revealed in Jesus Christ.⁶
- 2) Chemistry – The board of elders at Jacob’s Well is a community of people seeking God together. The board seeks to live and interact in a way that is consistent with our core identity, our calling, and our commitments. Therefore it is critical that the board operates with a shared spirit and collegiality. That is not to say that this group will be free from conflict. Just the opposite. However, there is constructive and destructive conflict. In monitoring the chemistry of this community we seek to host a space that invites robust interaction while still sharing life, hearts, and calling.⁷

² 1 Corinthians 1:7 – “Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.”

³ 1 Timothy 5:22 – “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

⁴ 1 Timothy 3:2-7, Titus 1:6-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4.

⁵ 1 Timothy 1:15-16 – “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.”

⁶ 1 Peter 3:13-16 – “Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

⁷ 1 Thessalonians 2:8b – “Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well.”

- 3) Competency – An elder serving on the board of Jacob’s Well Church also interacts in the surrounding community in their chosen profession. In light of that we likewise seek to identify women and men who demonstrate an equal level of maturity in their vocational lives as in the spiritual lives.⁸ In fact, we believe this distinction between one’s vocational and spiritual life to be false, but because they are too often separated in the minds of many, it bears elaboration for the purpose of clarity.
- 4) Commitment – To recognize someone as an elder is to say, in effect, “Live like this person does.” Of course saying such a thing invites fear and trembling, as it should. Nevertheless, that is what is at stake, by the grace of God. We are called. Because of this fact, we believe that it is reasonable to expect that people who serve as elders of Jacob’s Well are committed to who we are and what we are doing. The most accurate measure of a person’s commitments are shown by how they use their time and money. Therefore a very practical way to discern whether or not a person is qualified and called to function as an elder is whether or not they tithe and give sacrificially of their time.⁹
- 5) Covenant – The final qualification for being an elder at Jacob's Well Church is a willingness to covenant in relationship to the community of elders and to its purpose, roles, and responsibilities outlined in this document. Of particular importance is a commitment to the core identity, the calling, and the commitments of Jacob’s Well, especially as they are manifested by how we invest our time and or money.

Responsibilities

With those motivations and towards the fulfillment of our purpose as a community, the board of elders are charged with three integral responsibilities.

- 1) Discernment – The board of elders seeks to know and discover God and where his Spirit is at work both within and without the community so that we may join and participate with God’s work in the world and in us. To do that the following practices are part of our rhythm and discipline.
 - Prayer and fasting
 - Conversation
 - Learning
 - Listening
 - Observing
 - Brainstorming
 - Interviewing

⁸ 1 Timothy 3:7 – “He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and the devil’s trap.”

⁹ Matthew 6:21 – “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

2) **Shepherding** — The board of elders is charged to care for the people of Jacob’s Well as “under-shepherds of the Chief shepherd.”¹⁰ That does not mean that each elder is responsible for pastoring the people of our church, rather it names the pastoral function that elders have to be relationally connected to the people of Jacob’s Well and lead the church in a manner reflective of Jesus Christ. The following responsibilities may be included within the shepherding framework of the elder role.

- Participate in *Mission Community* and monthly board meeting
- Be willing to serve in the worship life of the community through the administration of the sacraments and the ministry of prayer
- Be present and regularly available to the elder board and the people of Jacob’s Well Church in her worship gatherings and life

3) **Governance** – The board of elders also seeks to oversee how the core identity, calling, and commitments are being worked out in the systems and structures of Jacob's Well Church. To do that the following responsibilities are part of our rhythm and discipline as well.

- Annual budget approval
- Capital decisions
- Hiring and oversight of senior-level staff
- Short-term participation on functional teams
- Crisis intervention and management
- Perpetuation of elder board through discernment, training, and ordination process

¹⁰ 1 Peter 5:1-4 — “To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.”