

Statement of Philosophy of Ministry

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Ministry (Gk *diakonos*, used 74 times in NT referring to servant, service), in the biblical sense, is the fulfillment of the Body of Christ, the church (as a body or an individual) in serving one another and the poor and suffering in obedience to God the Father. This is a joyous, sacrificial service out of love for the Father, the Son and those being served. This is accomplished in many ways as each member of the Body is uniquely gifted in this service (see 1 Corinthians 12). In regards to roles within the church there are three (3) primary positions of responsibility:

the Body at Large the Deacons and the Elders.

The Body at Large

All believers are members of the covenant body of Christ. While salvation is not based on local church membership, local membership is expected and implied in scripture (see Matt 18:15-20; Heb 10:23-25). Each member is expected to use their gifts for the benefit of other members (see 1 Cor 12). The majority of the true ministry of the body of Christ is performed by all disciples (see Exodus 19:5-6; Eph 4:12; 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9).

For this ministry to occur, the equipping of the saints must be a priority. Further, the family is the first institution that God established, for the propagation of Godly offspring (Mal 2:15). We must teach and affirm men in fulfilling their roles as family leaders for the glory of God. It is fathers, with mothers, who are responsible for the discipleship of their children (Deut 6:4-12, esp. 7-9). One of the most effective witnesses we present to the world is the blessing of a healthy, Godly family contrasting the world. As of late the church as a whole has failed in this regard and we must fall on our faces in conviction and repentance.

The Deacons

Deacons were established to benefit and bless the body at large by providing oversight and administration of the practical aspects of serving. This may include teaching as with Philip & Stephen, but is not a requirement, as it is for Elders. Further, the role of deacons is to free the Elders (or in Acts 6, apostles) to focus on their responsibilities of spiritual oversight, shepherding the disciples and prayer.

As the primary focus of this statement is directed to the ministry of Elders, the role of the Body and Deacons will be left as simply the above 'brief' descriptions.

The Elders

The role of Elders (also known as pastor/shepherd/overseer, and today as minister or reverend) is very much like that of the shepherd of old: provision, direction, and protection (see 1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; Acts 20; 1 Peter 5: 2). While the role of administration is often assigned to pastors today, many of these functions and responsibilities are more in the realm of deacons. The Pastor's primary responsibility is to provide for the spiritual development and protection of the Bride of Christ, as his under-shepherd.

Based on the Biblical requirements and responsibilities, Elders are to provide spiritual oversight of the local body of disciples, to feed teach these disciples and defend these disciples against false teachers (from without and within).

Prayer

As stated above, one of the activities that an elder is set aside for is concentrated prayer. The elder must set the example in prayer, as well as dedicate his time to praying for the flock under his charge. He must show the disciples, for whom he is responsible, that our Father in Heaven will answer and provide as we seek first His will and His heart in our lives.

Through prayer, elders must be in relationship (which means investing time) with the Great Shepherd and also the flock under their charge. They must know the Great Shepherd in order to care for the flock. The Great Shepherd knows each one; we as elders are to know each under our care (particularly the men; as the father goes, so goes the family).

Oversight

In regards to oversight of the household of God, elders need to provide Biblical counsel as needed to those under their care, maintaining an awareness of the relations within the Body, being proactive if conflicts arise to which threaten unity (John 15 & 17) and love within the fellowship.

Through their example, teaching, and if necessary correction, elders are to encourage loving Biblical relationships within families, challenging husbands/fathers to lead their families (Eph 5). Much like a/The Father, elders are to lead the Family of God.

In providing oversight, elders need to be encouraging all the members of the household to perform the duties they are capable of and called to do. Ministry and hospitality within the home is of first priority to be encouraged; this is the first institution God created and the primary means and setting for discipleship. Elders should be looking for leaders to be raised up among the flock and seeking opportunities to train and encourage them. Ministry should not be seen as limited to 'professional' or 'titled' ministers; ALL in the Body of Christ are ministers. Ministry should not be limited to a building, as the true church is not a structure but a living temple (see Eph 2:19-22). Families, led by fathers whenever possible, need to be encouraged to serve & minister in any setting as families.

Teaching

Elders, also, need to see that those under their charge receive teaching from the whole counsel of the Word of God; that they may be equipped for service. This should be done in a systematic way in order that the whole Word of God might be known. Preparing the disciples to face the World, elders need to provide 'feed' from the whole balanced diet of the word; they need to provide insightful application of the word to daily life; they need to see the cultural trends and prepare responses as the apostle John did in his first letter. These 'lessons' need be of practical application and example. Orthopraxy (right practice) as well as Orthodoxy (right teaching) is needed. Families must see firsthand how to live as a believing family. They need to see how to serve the poor, make wise financial decisions, how to share the word, etc.

Keep Watch/Defend

Elders must be willing and able to defend the flock from those who are teachers of false doctrines, whether within and without. Unity is to be maintained, yet it must be maintained on the truth of God's Word. The truth/the Word must be the point of unity, even if the truth is contrary to the direction of the culture, especially on moral issues. Elders must be aware of the issues facing the flock outside the doors of the building and address them, preparing them for the spiritual battle in which we are engaged. As Paul warned the Thessalonians we must prepare those under our charge for the opposition which likely lies ahead.

Responsibilities of the Elder/ Pastor

Rule/Manage/Oversee

1 Tim 3:4-5; 1 Pet 5:2

Feed/ Tend/ Teach

John 21:16; 1 Tim 5:17; Eph 4:12

Keep Watch / Guard / Defend / Refute / Rebuke

*Acts 20:28-31; Hebrews 13:17;
Titus 1:9*

Paid Elder/Pastor Model

Frankly, I have struggled with the paid/professional elder model. I admit there is Biblical precedent seen in the Levites & priests in the OT as well as Paul's comments in 1 Tim 5:17. Yet Paul himself is an example of providing for himself (tent-making) as he ministered, at times. There are benefits and detriments for both scenarios.

My biggest concerns are:

1. Many act as if the pastor is paid to do all the ministering, or that he alone can perform certain functions, particularly teaching, when ALL of the elders are required to be able to teach (the expectation of teaching is implied in this). Further, all the members of Christ's body are called to serve.
2. The paid elder is a hired man and can be removed if he teaches/preaches that which is uncomfortable, even if Biblical & needed. I know of a pastor who went to preach Biblically on sexuality and was informed by the chairmen of the elders that the subject would cost him his job if he continued; unfortunately, he flinched (2 Tim 4:33). Should I be placed in this position, I will side with the Scripture and my God.

So how does the role of the paid Pastor/Elder work with unpaid/lay Elders?

The role of the paid Elder is one who has increased availability to perform the role of Elder; his is the role to facilitate all performing the role together. ALL of the elders are called to perform this role, not to hire one to shoulder all of the responsibilities of shepherding. It is the calling of ALL the elders to be shepherding the flock of the Lord, to a ministry of prayer, study of the Word, to preach, teach and disciple. Should the paid Elder/pastor be unavailable for short time or long, ANY of the other Elders should be able to step in and fulfill this role.

References

Holy Bible, ESV

Strauch, Alexander. *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership*. Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1995. Print.