



Christ Church Blackpool

Leadership in the Local Church

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Introduction:

Our goal at Christ Church Blackpool is to establish both a structure and culture within the church that reflects what we find in Scripture.

Consequently, we strive to follow what we consider a biblical approach to church leadership—where a team of elders and deacons lead the local church, guided by apostles and apostolic teams. Who together, serve the church community for everyone's growth, protection and maturity in Christ.

1. What Are Elders?

Defining Church Leadership:

The title of a church leader varies among different churches; some use terms like minister or vicar, others prefer father or priest, and some choose pastor or elder. At Christ Church, we use the term elder (*presbuteros* in the Greek) because it reflects the language of the Bible. We prefer elder to pastor because, in the New Testament, elder refers to the office, while pastor (*poimen*, meaning "shepherd") describes the role's function. Along with differing names for their leaders, churches definitions for those names can also vary. Therefore, it is crucial to clarify what we mean by eldership before looking any further.

The Biblical Mandate for Eldership:

When Jesus ascended into Heaven He left one final command to His followers:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
Matthew 28:19-20

They responded by proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Saviour and forming local communities of believers called churches. Each church was led by a team of elders.

When the apostles [Paul and Barnabas] had preached the gospel [at Derbe] and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God. And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
Acts 14:21-23

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you.
Titus 1:5

Now from Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.
Acts 20:17

Old Testament Roots:

Elders are not introduced in the New Testament but have their root back in the ancient Israelite scriptures. Elders or זִקְנִים (*zeqenim*) in Hebrew, literally meaning "bearded ones". They were not just the oldest male members of the community but a recognized class of leaders who held collective authority over clans, tribes, and cities.

The office was not obtained through election but rather arose naturally from an individual's character. These men were regarded as the fathers of their communities, and though called the "bearded ones," this label did not imply that all Elders were elderly, nor that every older man was considered an elder. Instead, elders were men who, over time, had demonstrated trustworthy leadership within their households; exhibited maturity; and possessed the wisdom necessary to administer justice, uphold and protect the community's traditions, laws and teach the people God's word.

- **Good Character**

But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.

Exodus 18:21

- **Administer Justice**

If a man takes a wife and, after sleeping with her, dislikes her and slanders her and gives her a bad name, saying, "I married this woman, but when I approached her, I did not find proof of her virginity," then the young woman's father and mother shall bring to the town elders at the gate proof that she was a virgin.

Deuteronomy 22:13-15

- **Teach God's Word**

when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law.

Deuteronomy 31:11-12

- **Protect the People**

When they flee to one of these cities, they are to stand in the entrance of the city gate and state their case before the elders of that city. Then the elders are to admit the fugitive into their city and provide a place to live among them. If the avenger of blood comes in pursuit, the elders must not surrender the fugitive, because the fugitive killed their neighbour unintentionally and without malice aforethought.

Joshua 20:4-5

New Testament Application:

The term "elder" is the predominant name given to the office of church leader in the New Testament. Examining the scriptural context reveals how this historical role was interpreted and implemented within early church communities.

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

Acts 20:28-2

- **Elders are to Shepherd:** In Acts 20:17-38, Paul speaks to the “elders” of the Ephesian church. He tells them to be shepherds of the flock (the church). This again was well-known Old Testament language for leadership:

In the past, while Saul was king over us, you [David] were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the LORD said to you, ‘You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.

2 Samuel 5:2

Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding.

Jeremiah 3:15

Jesus picked up on this theme, using it of himself and calling the leaders of his church to also be shepherds of his people:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

John 10:11

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” “Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.” Again, Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.” The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.

John 21:15-17

Our word “pastor” comes from the Latin word for “shepherd”. Elders therefore are to “shepherd”, “pastor” their church community, meaning that like a shepherd in the hills with his sheep they are to:

- **Guide:** Lead by example.
- **Provide:** Feed the community through teaching.
- **Protect:** Guard from false teachers.
- **Sacrifice:** Prioritising the well-being of the members over themselves.

- **Elders are to Oversee:** Paul also describes an Elder as an overseer (episkopos), a term his audience would have recognized from civic and financial life. To them, an overseer was a steward responsible for four critical functions:
 - **Maintaining Order:** Establishing structure and settling disputes to ensure the community functioned smoothly.
 - **Managing Logistics:** Coordinating the practical needs of the group, such as the collection and distribution of resources.
 - **Ensuring Accountability:** Operating under human authority, with ultimate responsibility to Christ, in order to support the well-being of the community.
 - **Constant Vigilance:** Watching carefully to protect the group from external threats or internal decay.

Plurality of Leadership:

The Old Testament consistently references elders in plural form. Seventy individuals were selected to serve alongside Moses. Each tribe was represented by multiple elders, and even kings sought counsel from groups of elders.

The LORD said to Moses: "Bring me seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people. Have them come to the tent of meeting, that they may stand there with you. **Numbers 11:16**

Assemble before me all the elders of your tribes and all your officials, so that I can speak these words in their hearing. **Deuteronomy 31:28**

King David sent this message to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests: "Ask the elders of Judah, **2 Samuel 19:11**

Then King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father Solomon during his lifetime. **1 Kings 12:6**

Similarly, the apostles appointed multiple elders in each town; they wrote letters addressed to the elders of the church. The New Testament never depicts churches being led by a single elder, but by a team of elders with diverse gifts, working together to strengthen and serve the local church under their leadership.

Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord **Acts 14:23**

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: **1 Peter 5:1**

Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. **James 5:14**

In Summary:

An Elder is a character-proven leader called to serve as part of a team to shepherd and oversee the local church community through teaching, leading by example, and godly sacrifice.

2. Who Should Be An Elder?

Christ-like Leadership:

Elders are individuals recognised for both godly character and their proven ability to fulfil the biblical role described in Scripture. Because all Christian leadership must be modelled on Christ, they should follow His example of true humble, servant leadership.

When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, 'Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.'

John 13:12-15

Jesus called them to him and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great one's exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.'

Matthew 20:25-28

Qualifications:

The two places where the specific qualifications for eldership are described are in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, who were continuing his work of planting and establishing churches.

The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. Therefore, an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you – if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not

open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

Titus 1:5-9

It is important to clarify that while every elder must be 'able to teach,' not every elder is called to preach to the entire congregation. Paul makes a distinction later in 1 Timothy, noting that public preaching is a specific calling for certain gifted elders.

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.

1 Timothy 5:17

Still, as a shepherd, every elder must be capable of guiding and feeding the flock through the teaching of Scripture. But as Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus reveal, the primary measure of an elder is always character before gifting. A man may possess remarkable eloquence in teaching, yet if he is arrogant or quick-tempered, he is biblically disqualified from the office of elder. He might display extraordinary charismatic leadership, but if his household is in disorder, he cannot shepherd the family of God. While gifting is important, the New Testament unequivocally dictates that character must always come first.

In Summary:

Biblical eldership is defined by humble servant leadership modelled after Christ, prioritizing godly character over outward charisma or talent. According to the qualifications in 1 Timothy and Titus, an elder must be above reproach, self-controlled, and capable of managing his own household. While all elders must be able to guide the church through the teaching and application of Scripture, the New Testament emphasizes that integrity and spiritual maturity are the primary prerequisites for the office.

3. What About Women?

The Gender of Eldership:

In exploring the qualifications for elders, one particular element of identity demands a thorough examination due to its counter-cultural nature: the biblical stance on his gender. As we have seen in the Hebrew Scriptures, the term for elder literally 'the bearded ones'—referring specifically to a male office. This office was not open to every man but godly heads of families who were entrusted to exercise collective authority over the civic and spiritual life of Israel.

Paul reaffirms in his New Testament letters that elders must be men of godly character, responsible for shepherding, overseeing and teaching the community.

What male eldership does not mean:

Eldership is not a role that any man can do, but it is a role that only a man can do. It's helpful to begin thinking about why this is the case by dismissing several false assumptions:

a) The Bible teaches that men are superior to women:

This is simply untrue. Scripture presents women with greater dignity than the surrounding cultures of its time, affirming men and women as equal in value and equally vital to the growth and flourishing of God's kingdom.

So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. **Genesis 1:27**

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ. **Galatians 3:28**

b) Paul was opposed to women:

Rather than opposing women Paul's ministry was characterised by a high degree of collaboration with women, contradicting any notion of personal prejudice. The scriptures record several prominent female figures who Paul worked alongside:

- **Phoebe:** Entrusted as Paul's envoy to Rome and described as a patron of many (Romans 16:1-2).
- **Priscilla:** Mentioned alongside her husband, Aquila, but often listed first, indicating her prominence in their missionary work (Acts 18; Romans 16:3).
- **Lydia:** The first European convert, who provided a strategic base of operations for Paul's team (Acts 16).

- **Euodia and Syntyche:** Explicitly called "fellow workers" who laboured side-by-side with Paul (Philippians 4:2-3).
- **Chloe & Rufus's Mother:** Figures who provided friendship, assistance and care to Paul (1 Corinthians 1:11; Romans 16:13).

c) Women's leadership was restricted because their culture denied them education:

While true that only men could receive a good education in Roman world, the New Testament does not make formal education a qualification for leadership; in fact, Peter and John were described as "unschooled, ordinary men" in Acts 4:13.

d) The Bible was negatively affected by its male dominated culture which sidelined and overlooked women:

In a male-dominated and sexist world, the Bible's teaching about women is radically countercultural from beginning to end. Jesus himself taught women, formed meaningful friendships with them, used them as positive examples in His teaching, and affirmed their spiritual equality with men.

She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. **Luke 10:39**

Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. **John 11:5**

Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her? **Luke 13:16**

The writers of the gospels also show that women supported His mission with finance and hospitality, and that it was almost only women who stayed faithful to Him when He was being crucified

Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means. **Luke 8:3**

Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons. **Matthew 27:55-56**

The Gospels present women as the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the risen Jesus, believing before the male disciples. Although

women's testimony was not accepted on its own in that culture, God entrusted them with the first announcement of the resurrection to His church.

So, the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Matthew 28:8-10

Furthermore, the New Testament does not describe a church where women are sidelined; rather, it portrays a community where they were deeply involved in every aspect of church life.

- **Spiritual Gifts:** The Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts were poured out on both men and women without distinction, enabling everyone to contribute to the body of Christ (Acts 2:17-18, 1 Corinthians 12:7).
- **Public Prayer and Prophecy:** Women held visible roles in corporate worship. Paul specifically provides instructions for women as they pray and prophecy in public gatherings (**1 Corinthians 11:5**).
- **Mutual Encouragement and Teaching:** Paul's exhortations to the "whole church" included women. He encouraged all believers to use their gifts to teach and admonish one another through songs, wisdom, and service (Colossians 3:16, Romans 12:6-7, 1 Corinthians 14:26).
- **Diverse Ministry Roles:** Beyond prophecy, women were expected to participate in the wide range of spiritual activities described in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11, working alongside men to strengthen the whole community.

Historical evidence also suggests that women in the early church were drawn to Christianity because it affirmed their dignity and regarded them as equal to men. Some historians argue that the Western idea of equality originated from Christian teachings, and studies of cultures recently influenced by the gospel indicate this trend still persists. While certain churches through history have mistreated, silenced and ignored its women, such actions stemmed from disregarding and misunderstanding the teachings of Christ and His Scripture.

Now we will look at what the Bible teaches about men and women, in order to understand why the New Testament clearly assigns the role of eldership to only certain men.

A very brief theology of gender:

Genesis chapters 1 and 2 were written to help us understand both God's nature and our own identity. Genesis 1 presents a series of pairs within creation, Heaven and Earth, land and sea and so on. This pattern reaches its peak with the introduction of man and woman as the final pair. Our biology reflects this theological concept: though we are different, we share similarities and are designed to complement each other.

In Genesis 2 we see Adam meeting and naming all the animals in creation, but he is alone: there is no-one like him. God then makes Eve from Adam, and seeing her makes Adam sing:

This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. **Genesis 2:23**

These accounts show that men and women are both equal and distinct. As Timothy Keller notes, "we are equal but not equivalent." The Bible teaches that men and women are created differently for each other and for God, with both reflecting God's image, which can only be comprehended by rejoicing in both genders:

So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. **Genesis 1:27**

Differing roles:

While Scripture affirms the spiritual equality of all believers while identifying two specific areas where roles are distinct, marriage and church leadership:

- **Marriage:** Paul teaches that marriage is about more than a man and a woman loving each other:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Saviour. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. **Ephesians 5:22-25**

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. **Ephesians 5: 31-32**

Marriage is ultimately a picture of Christ's love for the church which should demonstrate to the world how Jesus treats His church and how the church responds to Him. Within marriage, the husband is given the role of illustrating Christ. Scripture establishes that just as Christ is the head of His bride, the Church, the husband is the head of his wife. This call to 'headship' is defined as sacrificial, Christ-like leadership which prioritises the well-being and spiritual growth of his wife over himself,

mirroring the same selfless devotion that Christ demonstrated when He gave His life for His people.

The wife's role is to illustrate the church's joyful and voluntary submission to the gracious leadership of Jesus. By following her husband's sacrificial lead, she serves as a living parable that demonstrates how the redeemed people of God respond to the love of Christ.

It is important to note that the interplay between a husband and a wife is not how all male and female relationships are meant to be, and when Jesus returns, when we are with Him forever, marriage will have served its function and neither husbands nor wives will play these roles as they currently do. (2 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 19:9, Matthew 22:29-30). Therefore, it is vital to distinguish between identity and having a role: being a husband, a wife, a servant, or a citizen are roles we inhabit, whereas being male and female is who we are. While our biological sex naturally informs these roles—a woman is a wife, not a husband—biblical submission is not a mandate of one gender to another, but a response within a specific relationship. A wife does not submit to a man because of his 'manhood,' but to her husband because of his unique covenantal bond and the sacred duties he has pledged to uphold within their marriage.

- **Submission:** Submission is the voluntary yielding to another. All Christians are called to submit to each other (Ephesians 5:21). While submission often carries negative connotations in our culture, the Bible presents it as Christlike.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death — even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:5-11

Jesus' submission to the Father's will is celebrated. He was not coerced into submission but delighted to do so. He did not give up His intelligence by submitting but used it fully. He was glorified because of it. To demonstrate Christlike submission is a great privilege that anticipates the coming day when the church will be presented to

Christ as His pure bride, the eternal destiny of all of us, male and female (2 Corinthians 11:2, Revelation 21:2).

- **Church leadership:** Paul established the connection between marriage and the church in Ephesians 5:

This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Ephesians 5:32-33

Elsewhere in the New Testament the church is called the household of God (Ephesians 2:19, Galatians 6:10, 1 Timothy 3:15, Hebrews 3:6). The early Christian communities met in homes and the "household" was a powerful description of the familial nature of the relationships Christians are to have. Using this image, elders are called to take the role of head of the household. This is why elders are men, usually husbands and fathers, because they have proved their trustworthiness for the role in these corresponding areas.

In Summary:

This teaching of "equal but not the same" is known as complementarianism. For us at Christ Church, this means:

- All women and men are equal in value.
- Gender is a God-given blessing which glorifies God when it is recognised and respected.
- Within marriage and church leadership there are distinct roles for men and women to play.
- Eldership in the church is equated with the role of the husband in the family, so only men should be appointed as elders.

4. Who Are Deacons?

In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

1 Timothy 3:8-13

To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.

Philippians 1:1

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon, of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

Romans 16:1-2

Servant Leaders:

In the New Testament, deacons held an official position within the early church. Like elders, only individuals with strong moral character were eligible to serve in this capacity. Paul emphasized that deacons should be sincere, self-controlled, and thoroughly evaluated to ensure they are above reproach before taking office. Deacons were not merely assistants; they were required to have a solid and clear comprehension of the Christian faith. In addition, much like elders, they were expected to manage their families and personal lives faithfully and respectfully.

The word deacon comes from the Greek *diakonos*, meaning "servant," which perfectly captures their role: they are servant leaders who support the health of the church through practical action and spiritual maturity.

Although they weren't formally named deacons, most agree the seven in Acts 6 performed duties later associated with the office of deacon. Thus, Acts 6 likely offers the clearest description of a deacon's role.

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.

Acts 6:1-4

Much like the standards established in 1 Timothy 3, they were individuals of proven godly character called to co-labour with church leaders—the apostles, in the early church context. They were entrusted to serve the church by providing leadership over specific practical areas, ensuring that the needs of the community were met with integrity and care.

Women:

Unlike the office of elder, the role of deacon is clearly presented as one open to both men and women. In 1 Timothy 3:11, Paul pauses his list of qualifications to address "the women" specifically, outlining character traits that mirror those of their male counterparts.

Furthermore, in Romans 16:1, Paul explicitly identifies Phoebe as "a deacon of the church in Cenchreae", confirming that women definitely held this recognized office. This biblical precedent is supported by both Christian and secular historical sources, which frequently refer to "deaconesses"—a term used in the early church to describe women who served the congregation in these vital leadership roles.

In Summary:

Deacons are servant leaders of high integrity and spiritual maturity who manage the practical needs of the church. This biblical office is a vital co-labouring role with the elders, open to both men and women, as evidenced by the specific qualifications in 1 Timothy and the historical example of Phoebe in Romans 16.

5. What About Apostles?

The Twelve:

During His earthly ministry, Jesus called many people to follow Him, but He specifically appointed twelve men as His apostles:

And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons

Mark 3:13-15

Sent Ones:

Mark gives us the definition of an apostle: they are a “sent one.” Jesus is the original sent one, sent from the Father to Earth, the great apostle (Hebrews 3:1). We see apostles at work throughout the New Testament: spreading the good news of Jesus (Acts 2:14-40, 13:1-4), doing miracles (Acts 3:6-7), establishing churches and making sure those churches were built on good foundations (Acts 8:14-16, 14:24-28, 1 Corinthians 3:10).

Apostles Today:

Our belief is that Jesus continues to appoint apostles in the present day, a view that is not universal among evangelical Christians. Some people worry that claiming apostolic status today suggests someone has the same level of divine inspiration and authority as the New Testament authors. The argument goes that, since the Bible is now complete, there is no longer a need for apostles.

The main counterpoint is that not all twelve original apostles wrote parts of the New Testament; only Matthew, John, and Peter are traditionally credited, though scholars debate the true authorship of the Gospel of John, the letters 1–3 John, and whether the John who wrote Revelation was the same as John, brother to James and son of Zebedee. Much of the New Testament was authored by others who were not among the twelve: Paul, Mark, Luke, James and Jude (the brothers of Jesus), as well as an unknown author of the Letter to the Hebrews. While Paul is widely accepted as a unique case due to his evident apostolic authority, this explanation does not fully address the inclusion of the other writers.

There is also the fact that others are described as apostles: Barnabas (Acts 14:14) and James the brother of Jesus (Galatians 1:19). Some have made the case that others such as Apollos (1 Corinthians 4:6-9), Timothy and Silvanus (1 Thessalonians 1:1 and 2:6), Andronicus and Junias (Romans 16:7) may have also been considered apostles.

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming.

Ephesians 4:11-14

Moreover, in Ephesians 4 Paul speaks of apostles as one of Christ's gifts to the church for her maturity, including them in a list with prophets, evangelists, pastor and teachers. The grammatical structure of the sentence doesn't allow for some of the gifts on that list to be considered for the present and others to be for a fixed time only. Paul says that these gifts will be given to the church "until we all attain to the unity of the faith and ... to mature manhood," which suggests that it is still needed today.

The Role:

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it.

1 Corinthians 3:10

To Timothy, my true child in the faith

1 Timothy 1:2

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth.

3 John 1:4

Apostolic ministry is characterized by establishing spiritual foundations and "fathering" leaders. This dual role involves ensuring the church adheres to sound doctrine while wisely applying Christ's teachings to foster the corporate maturity described in Ephesians 4. This ministry is deeply relational, as seen in Paul's role as a spiritual father to Timothy and John the Elder's paternal care for the church. This is surely as important a gift now as it has always been, and it will remain essential until Jesus returns.

ChristCentral:

Newfrontiers is an apostolic family of churches, linked by our relationships with each other through the apostolic ministry of Terry Virgo. Newfrontiers began in the late 1970's and has grown into a worldwide family of churches. Under Terry's leadership, many apostolic ministries emerged, all sharing a unified vision and guided by interconnected teams. Today, these are identified as 'spheres,' a term rooted in the biblical precedent of Paul's own 'sphere of influence' described in 2 Corinthians 10:13–14. The sphere we are part of is called ChristCentral and it is led by Jeremy Simpkins, whose apostolic gifting we recognise and welcome. Jeremy's vision for ChristCentral is shared by us. We connect with other churches within our sphere and benefit from the guidance provided by Jeremy and his team—both as a congregation and as church elders.

In Summary:

Apostles are "sent ones" who establish spiritual foundations, safeguard sound doctrine, and "father" leaders to bring the church to maturity. While some believe the office ceased with the early church, the New Testament is clear that apostles are an ongoing gift to help the body of Christ reach unity and fullness. Within the Newfrontiers family, this is expressed through "spheres" like ChristCentral, where churches link together through relational leadership and a shared apostolic vision.

6. What Does This Look Like At Christ Church?

Our eldership team:

Christ Church has a team of elders: Ben Read, Julian Selley, Segun Odeyinbo and Skip Read.

Ben is the recognised leader of the team. Every team needs a leader, and this is even modelled for us by the Father within the Trinity. Being the team lead does not separate or set him above the other elders. Paul asserted that elders could be paid, especially those who were involved in teaching (1 Timothy 5:17-18). Currently only Ben is paid, part time, but our vision is to increase this and take on other paid members of staff when appropriate.

Beyond the biblical principle of a plurality of elders, the New Testament does not mandate a specific number for any congregation. Instead, a church should be led by enough elders to faithfully fulfil its unique calling. At Christ Church, we are committed to a culture of constant growth and training. We recognize that God's path for these leaders varies: some will serve in vital ministry roles, others will be sent to strengthen or plant new churches, and some will be raised up as future elders within our own church.

Appointing elders:

We believe that four parties are involved in the appointing of elders:

1. **God** (Acts 20:28). "Spiritual authority comes from God's ordaining, not man's attaining" (Matthew Hosier). We are looking for evidence of God's work in a man that would qualify him to serve as an elder. This evidence would include a godly character and spiritual authority.
2. **Apostles**. Apostles serve in ensuring that the local church has a solid foundation in God's truth and is being built according to God's pattern, so they are especially concerned with eldership. Paul appointed elders in all the churches he planted, and when he couldn't be there in person told his delegates to do so (Titus 1:5). We welcome Jeremy's apostolic ministry, along with others within ChristCentral to whom he delegates this.
3. **Other elders** (1 Timothy 4:14). New Testament churches always had plural elders, so any new elder will be joining a team. The team's confidence in God's anointing of him, and ability to work with him, is essential for the healthy functioning of the church.

4. **The local church** (Acts 14:23). A congregation should know those who are being appointed as elders – their character and gifting – which should give them confidence in the decision being made. In order to ensure this is the case, the current elders announce their intention to appoint someone as an elder and then have a period of time in which the church can ask questions of them share its perspective on them, which will be considered.

Wives of elders:

The New Testament does not prescribe a specific 'job description' for the wives of elders, and as a church, we follow that same principle. While they often possess unique insight and wisdom that is an asset to the leadership of the church, they do not hold defined roles or responsibilities based solely on their marriage. An elder's wife may serve as a deacon or lead a specific ministry, but these roles are based on her own godly character, spiritual gifting, and call to serve. Ultimately, her contribution to the church is a matter of her personal walk with God and the specific ways He has equipped and called her.

Our deacons' team:

In addition to an eldership team, Christ Church benefits from a dedicated group of deacons. These servant leaders work alongside the elders to support various areas throughout the church, ensuring the well-being of the entire body by addressing its physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. Our deacons are Geoff Foster, Jen Read, Kofo Awode, Libby Foster and Tomi Odeyinbo.

The Church

In addition to the role of Elders and Deacons, we believe that every believer is called to lead right where they are, setting an example in their daily life, (1Timothy 4:12) using their unique gifts, of time, and resources for the glory of God and the expansion of His kingdom (1Corinthians 10:31, Peter 4:10). This includes ministry leaders and trustees, but also many vital members who serve faithfully without an official title. We believe it is the responsibility of the elders to equip the church for spiritual maturity, by releasing and encouraging the entire church body into the good works that the Father has already prepared for them (Ephesians 4:11-12, Ephesians 2:10)