

# Second Mile Elder Team<sup>1</sup>

This document is designed to explain the practical functioning of the elder team at Second Mile Church. Specifically, it will discuss presuppositions that guide the overall structure and function of the elder team, the qualities and responsibilities of the elders, length of commitment to the elder team, some guiding principles for functioning as a team, the expectations for elder team meetings, and the process by which elders are established.

## I. **Presuppositions:**

- A. Jesus is the Senior Leader of the church. He builds and sustains it. It's *his* church.
- B. Having godly, courageous, skilled, and unified leadership is essential to the health of the church.
- C. Elders are the male leaders of the church who are synonymously called pastors, bishops, and overseers throughout the New Testament. While the various words are used interchangeably, they each refer to a differing aspect of the same role in the same office. Therefore, the elder team will consist of both paid and unpaid elders.
- D. Elder is an office, not an identity. The elders are those officially serving on the team.
- E. A person does not need to be an elder in order to have influence or leadership in the church. There will be some excellent leaders who do not hold the office of elder.
- F. Eldership should be a great joy and a life-giving experience. It need not be destructive to a man's spiritual vitality, family, ministry, or quality of life.
- G. As the church grows in size and complexity (additional staff, ministries, campuses, etc), the structure and function of the elder team will need to experience change and reorganization. For example, the addition of additional paid elders will likely make it increasingly difficult to keep unpaid elders "in the loop," and may require a change of roles and expectations.
- H. The leadership structure of the church must be flexible enough to get the right people to the table for any given decision.

## II. **Qualities of Elders:**

- A. Elders must consistently demonstrate the qualities described in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9.<sup>2</sup>
- B. In addition to godly *character*, elders must demonstrate *competency* (the skills involved in leading ministry) and *commitment*, as well as share a high level of *chemistry* with the existing elders. This does not mean that the elders will all have the same personalities, temperaments, or gifts, but it does mean that they will have the ability to joyfully work together as committed ministry partners.
- C. Elders need to have attended Second Mile for at least one year with a consistent track record of servanthood, ministry fruitfulness, and faithful giving to the church.

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<sup>1</sup> The specifics of this document, particularly sections IV, VI, and VII, are subject to change as the church grows, changes, and more lessons are learned that will allow us to improve.

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed explanation of these qualities, see Mark Driscoll, *On Church Leadership* and Gene Getz, *Elders and Leaders*. Note regarding some of the more controversial qualities: (1) We take "able to teach" to mean an effective Bible communicator in a group setting. This does not mean "able to wow an auditorium full of people," but it does mean "able to communicate in a practical, accurate, clear, and engaging way with at least a small group of people." (2) We take "husband of one wife" to mean a one-woman man. Men who have experienced divorce must be considered on a case-by-case basis. (3) We take "submissive children" and "children who believe (faithful)" to mean that the man has been successful in raising obedient, honorable children. The specific outworking of this in any man's life will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

### **III. Responsibilities of Elder Team:**

- A. Oversee the Church (1 Peter 5:2; 1 Timothy 5:17)
  - 1. Guard the church's Doctrine, Mission, Vision, and Core Values<sup>3</sup>
  - 2. Maintain responsibility for financial integrity of church through review and approval of top-level budget expenditures
  - 3. Engage in the long range planning for facilities
  - 4. Approve hiring and firing of paid pastoral staff
  - 5. Approve and send church planters
  
- B. Tend to the Needs of the Flock (Acts 20:28)
  - 1. Regularly attend worship gatherings and be involved in the mainstream flow of church life (community groups, special events, ministries, etc.)
  - 2. Lead, teach, and minister in your sphere of influence
  - 3. Develop additional leaders in the church<sup>4</sup>
  - 4. Pray regularly for the church
  - 5. Pray for the sick as requested
  
- C. Be on Watch for Trouble (Acts 20:29-31; Hebrews 13:17)
  - 1. Individually be grounded in the Scripture and connected to the Spirit so that we know what trouble looks like
  - 2. Exercise church discipline on unrepentant Christians
  - 3. Evaluate our mistakes and, if necessary, take steps to correct them
  
- D. Live the Normal Christian Life (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:3)
  - 1. We do not ask others to go where we have not been
  - 2. Model through our:
    - a. Devotional disciplines to God
    - b. Family life
    - c. Vocational life
    - d. Church life
    - e. Financial stewardship

### **IV. Length of Commitment for Elder Team:**

- A. Elders should have a heart to serve the church on the elder team as long as they are able, effective, and can do it energetically. Thus, an elder should have the humility and wisdom to willingly remove himself from the team if he is no longer able to effectively serve on the team.
- B. Elders will commit to one-year terms, which may be renewed indefinitely. Men who anticipate that they will only be elders for a short time would be wise to avoid the process altogether. The annual assessment of the elder team will happen at the same time each year.

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<sup>3</sup> Available for review at <http://www.secondmilechurch.com/about-us/>

<sup>4</sup> "An elder is not someone who is a helper that does a lot of work for the church, because that is the definition of a deacon. Rather, an elder is a leader who trains other leaders to lead various aspects of the church...no man should be an elder unless he can effectively train people to not only be mature Christians, but can also train some of those mature Christians to be church leaders who train other leaders" (Driscoll, *On Church Leadership*, 19-20).

## **V. Guiding Principles for Functioning as a Team:**

- A. **Mutual submission.** The Lead Pastor functions as the “first among equals,” and the entire elder team submits to one another on the basis of strengths, passions and giftedness.<sup>5</sup>
- B. **Unity is a High Priority.** Unity must include *theological agreement* about what doctrines we will and will not fight over, *relational warmth and sincere friendships* that include spouses and children, *philosophical agreement* regarding what ministry methods will and will not be used, and *a missional partnership* that agrees to stay on task to fulfill God’s mission for Second Mile Church.
- C. **Big-Picture Leadership.** The elder team’s authority over the whole church rests in the team as a whole. Individual board members do not have authority over the whole church (though they will often have authority over their specific areas of ministry). The elder team should focus on the big-picture mission, doctrine, ministry principles, and vision of the church rather than the details of implementation. The elder team is responsible for creating the future, not minding the shop. Additionally, team members are responsible first and foremost for the health and well-being of the church *as a whole* and are not representatives or advocates of specific ministries or groups. Outside of elder team decisions, individual elders must honor, submit to, and work through the appropriate chain of command and leadership in any given ministry area.
- D. **Choose to Trust.** The elder team will choose to trust each other, rather than suspect each other. We will develop a culture of trust, built on these five commitments:
  - 1. I will believe the best about my fellow elders.
  - 2. When other people assume the worst about you, I will come to your defense.
  - 3. If what I experience begins to erode my trust, I will come directly to you to talk about it.
  - 4. When I am convinced I will not be able to deliver on a promise, I will come to you ahead of time.
  - 5. When you confront me about the gaps I’ve created, I will tell you the truth.
- E. **Candid Communication.** The elder team expects open, candid communication between team members and during team meetings. The elder team requires gospel-rooted security and thick skin that enables us to share our thoughts candidly and, when necessary, fight like family. This will allow team members to share openly and offer warnings or disagreements while a decision is being considered, but then champion and defend the decision after it is made.
- F. **Relationships Nurture Trust.** It is always easier to believe the best and trust men with whom you have relational warmth and sincere friendship. Elders should invest in one another relationally and cultivate the kinds of authentic friendships that we would call our people to embrace. This does not mean that elders need to be best friends, spend lots of free time together, or have each other over for dinner all the time. But it does mean that each elder is responsible to cultivate healthy relationships with the other elders.
- G. **For Your Wife, Ignorance is Bliss.** Elders should share information with their wives on a need-to-know basis. It is unwise and unfair to burden your wife with the weight of leadership and information about certain people or decisions. Your wife should be able to go to any church event and genuinely think the best of anyone she meets. Some wives will rejoice at this principle. Others will resist it and want to be “in the loop” in order to support you. But this principle exists for her good and the good of the church.

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<sup>5</sup> Alexander Strauch writes, “Failure to understand the concept of ‘first among equals’ (or 1 Timothy 5:17) has caused some elderships to be tragically ineffective in their pastoral care and leadership. Although elders act jointly as a council and share equal authority and responsibility for the leadership of the church, all are not equal in their giftedness, biblical knowledge, leadership ability, experience, or dedication” (*Biblical Eldership*, 45).

## **VI. Expectations for Elder Team Meetings:**

- A. The elders will meet twice per month. All elders are expected to attend and must give advance notification when absent.
  - 1. One meeting will be exclusively for prayer, ministry training, discipleship and mutual care (these meetings may sometimes include spouses and/or children).
  - 2. One meeting will be focused on church oversight or "business." These meetings will have a set agenda, which will be organized by the Lead Pastor. Agenda items must be submitted in advance. Often times, proposals or ideas should be distributed in writing in advance in order to maximize the effectiveness of the discussion.
- B. The elders will have at least one out-of-town experience together per year. This may be a retreat, going to a conference together, or doing an out of town "church tour" trip.
- C. Additional meetings may be required to deal with unexpected or time-sensitive issues.

## **VII. Elder Process:**

### **A. Establish an Observable Track Record**

- 1. Establish a known track record serving, leading and giving in Second Mile with demonstrated leadership skills and observable fruit in ministry, marriage and family life.

### **B. Nomination Phase**

- 1. The elder team may nominate and approach certain men whom the team thinks should prayerfully consider being an elder.
- 2. When a Second Mile member senses an internal call from the Holy Spirit to serve as an elder/pastor, he should make his desire known to the current elder team. Those men will confirm the calling and give further direction.
- 3. All elders must approve nominees to enter the Applicant Phase.

### **C. Applicant Phase**

- 1. The elder team will assign each applicant a supervising elder, who will answer questions and be the primary point of contact for the applicant.
- 2. The applicant will submit the following information to his supervising elder:
  - a. Updated Family Photo
  - b. Applicant Essay – Personal history essay including family origin, marital history, theological influences, eldership calling and testimony.
  - c. Family Finance Survey
  - d. Pastoral Questionnaire
  - e. Confidential Personal Questionnaire/Background Check Forms – Must be submitted before interview
- 3. The Application Phase is to be completed with an assessment interview of the applicant and his wife (usually over dinner) by the supervising elder and at least one other elder to determine if the candidate continues with the eldership process after reviewing the above documents.
- 4. All elders must approve applicants to enter the Candidate Phase.

### **D. Candidate Phase**

- 1. Once a man has had his calling and qualifications confirmed by the elders, he may enter a phase of study and preparation for the specific work of eldership. This phase involves intentional mentorship by the current elders and careful biblical, theological, and philosophical study regarding the roles, responsibilities, and functions of elders. The time required to complete this phase will vary by individual.
- 2. Attend the Surge School of Transformational Leadership (if not already completed)
- 3. This phase also includes:
  - a. Guided self-study (actual content depends on the individual)
  - b. Careful study of Second Mile's doctrinal statement and philosophy of ministry.
  - c. Invitation to elder meetings for observation and participation.

- d. Multiple conversations and interactions with current elders to assess the candidate's "fit" in the ministry context of Second Mile (Note: it is possible for a man to *personally* meet all the biblical qualifications, yet not fit the chemistry of the existing elder team).
- e. Follow-up on any issues raised during the assessment interview.
4. When the supervising elder senses that the candidate is ready, he will recommend him for the Approval Phase.
5. All elders must approve candidates to enter the Approval Phase.

**E. Approval Phase**

1. At the beginning of the Approval Phase, the members of Second Mile will be urged to evaluate the lives and conduct of the potential elders. If a member is aware of any disqualifying sin or character flaw in an elder candidate, he or she will be urged to make the matter known to the existing elders, who will investigate the claim. Members will have a 4-week window in which to bring any concerns.
2. All elders must vote to install the candidate as an elder.

**F. Installation**

1. Following the satisfactory completion of all requirements, new elders will be installed publicly at a Second Mile worship gathering.