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## **Biblical Church Governance: Returning To Plural-Elder Congregationalism from Policy-Based Governance Models**

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## **Biblical Church Governance: Returning To Plural-Elder Congregationalism from Policy-Based Governance Models**

### **Abstract**

This paper critiques the growing adoption of policy-based governance models in local church contexts and argues for a return to plural-elder congregationalism as the most biblically faithful and historically rooted model of church government. While policy-based governance, derived from John Carver's framework for nonprofit leadership, offers administrative strengths such as consistency, accountability, and efficiency, its application within the church often results in the diminishment of biblically mandated roles—particularly the deacon—and fosters a corporate rather than ecclesial culture. The author contends that such models misunderstand and misapply the New Testament offices of elder and deacon, violating the biblical pattern of shared spiritual leadership and practical service. In response, the paper presents a theological and ecclesiological defense of plural-elder congregationalism, grounded in the doctrines of the priesthood of all believers and the corporate nature of the body of Christ. Drawing on scriptural exegesis and historical examples, this model is proposed as one that re-centers authority within the local congregation while maintaining biblical leadership structures, thereby promoting unity, mutual accountability, and active participation in the life of the Church.

### **Keywords**

Church governance, policy-based governance, plural eldership, congregationalism, ecclesiology, deacon, elder, biblical leadership, priesthood of believers, church polity

### **Cover Page Footnote**

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## Biblical Church Governance

Like any other organization, the Church requires structure, order, and direction to accomplish its mission efficiently and effectively. Historically speaking, the primary mode of operationalization to meet these ends has been through establishing elders and deacons, using qualifications laid out by New Testament passages, such as 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-16, to carry out the example the apostles outlined in Acts 6:1-7. This mode has led to the establishment of single- and plural-elder congregationalism, a church government model that “stresses the role of the individual Christian and makes the local congregation the seat of authority.”<sup>1</sup> Thus, congregants install a set number of elders in the form of pastors, whether a single elder or a plurality of elders with a ruling elder as the senior pastor.

However, with the publication of John Carver’s *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations* initially in 1990 and revised in 2006, a growing number of churches in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have opted instead to employ what many term a policy-based governance model, effectively eliminating the office of elder and truncating the diaconal office to the board member role. While such a model offers certain administrative advantages, this often leads to a concentration of power and a disconnect between the leadership and the congregation. This paper argues that plural-elder congregationalism, with its emphasis on shared leadership and congregational involvement, provides a more biblically sound and historically supported model for church governance, unlike policy-based governance, which can lead to the concentration of power and a disconnect between leadership and the congregation.

## Overview Of Policy-Based Governance

The concept of policy-based governance came into view with John Carver’s *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations*. A fundamental resource designed for “governmental and nonprofit governing boards,” by Carver’s own admission, he sought to provide a resource to help these sectors build a “foundation that would enable [these organizations] to define success and failure, to know what is worth doing, and even to recognize good performance.”<sup>2</sup> This structure has gained traction in recent years

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<sup>1</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 998.

<sup>2</sup> John Carver, *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 12-14.

and has aided churches as they seek to “be fruitful in ministry, effective in mission, and efficient in the use of [their] resources.”<sup>3</sup>

### Defining Policy-Based Governance

Policy-based governance is a framework where clearly defined policies guide organizational decisions and actions enacted by a governing board, whose central role, according to Peter, is to “formulate policies that then are to be executed by a chief executive officer (CEO) working through his staff.”<sup>4</sup> Policies are designed to anticipate potential issues and provide guidance in advance. They promote consistency in operations and decision-making across the organization, leading to standardized practices and outcomes while enhancing transparency and accountability by making rules and expectations explicit. In creating policies, the board’s work is an essential tool that guides decision-making and shapes operational frameworks. Hotchkiss and Robinson write, “Policies provide a framework for decisions to be made away from the board table.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, policies ensure consistent decisions across the organization, avoiding arbitrary or conflicting actions, and serve as blueprints for defining processes, procedures, and standards. They communicate clear expectations to employees and stakeholders regarding acceptable behavior, performance standards, and organizational commitments, which enables the board to carry out effective delegation and the CEO to empower individuals.

### Policy-Based Governance Within The Church Context

In their contribution to Dever’s and Leeman’s *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, Wellum and Wellum argue that “[w]hether we want to admit it or not, churches are often influenced by the leadership and organizational models present in the surrounding culture.”<sup>6</sup> Such is the case regarding the policy-based governance model. When applied to a church setting, the governing board holds a position of significant responsibility and spiritual leadership. The board oversees the church’s administration, including financial management, strategic planning, and policy development. It works with

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<sup>3</sup> David J. Peter, *Organizing for Ministry and Mission: Options for Church Structure* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2023), 85.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 78.

<sup>5</sup> Dan Hotchkiss and Anthony B. Robinson, *Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016), Chapter 5, “Governance by Policy,” para.3, Logos.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen J. Wellum and Kirk Wellum, “The Biblical and Theological Case for Congregationalism,” in *Baptist Foundations: Church Government for an Anti-Institutional Age*, 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2015), 47.

the lead pastor to ensure the church operates with integrity and transparency, adhering to legal requirements and best practices. The lead pastor provides spiritual leadership and care for the congregation, while the board offers support and accountability in the CEO role. The congregation, in turn, looks to both the pastor and the board for spiritual guidance and leadership. Allison explains the application this way: “The lead pastor is like a CEO, board members function like directors of a corporation, and the members are treated like shareholders who vote with their attendance and their money.”<sup>7</sup> While the specific dynamics may vary depending on church polity and individual personalities, the goal is to foster a collaborative environment where each entity works together to edify the body of Christ.

### Strengths Of Policy-Based Governance

Policy-based governance has three dominant strengths: promoting consistency in decision-making, ensuring accountability for leaders, and improving administrative efficiency. By establishing clear guidelines and procedures, boards and their policies ensure that decisions are made based on established principles rather than personal preferences or situational pressures. This consistency fosters a sense of fairness and predictability within the church, as members can trust that leaders will handle similar situations in similar ways. This model also enhances accountability for church leaders. As, according to Peter, “board members are lay representatives elected by the congregational assembly who are responsible to make strategic and fiduciary decisions for the good of the congregation,”<sup>8</sup> this method of governance affords a broader lens of visibility to the inner workings of the church staff, ensuring healthy operational rigor. Additionally, this structure significantly improves church administration efficiency, as transparent processes and procedures streamline operations, reduce ambiguity, and facilitate delegation. It empowers staff workers to function creatively as they manage their ministry areas—within the confines of the assigned policies—without the need to actively seek permission since fewer layers of authority are required to obtain permission to act.<sup>9</sup>

### Weaknesses Of Policy-Based Governance

Although policy-based governance presents many advantages, it is imperative to recognize the possible disadvantages that may emerge if not executed with meticulous consideration. In this model, governing boards can inadvertently

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<sup>7</sup> Gregg R. Allison, *The Church: An Introduction*, ed. Graham A. Cole and Oren R. Martin, Short Studies in Systematic Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 104.

<sup>8</sup> Peter, *Organizing for Ministry and Mission: Options for Church*, 80.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 88.

concentrate power by focusing on the technical aspects of policy development and implementation, effectively taking on the role of management and overstepping into the work that the board had charged the pastoral staff to accomplish. Referring to this situation, Peter writes, “The professional ministry staff do not participate directly in the most important decisions that are made for the [church] regarding its mission, vision, and goals. They do not have a direct voice in determining the strategic direction of the church and the specific program areas entrusted to them. This can lead to frustration and resentment.”<sup>10</sup> The staff team then becomes pawns on a chessboard with their roles micromanaged and their God-given talents shelved.

Additionally, there is a risk of communication barriers between the board and the congregation. This confusion can occur if policies are not clearly communicated or if the rationale behind decisions is not transparent. Carver writes, “Board policy can be alive but invisible. Although it is hard to find true board policy in written form, it is always possible to find it in unwritten form... Implicit policy not only fills in for the missing explicit policy but is used to excuse the absence of the latter.”<sup>11</sup> This policy leads to the board’s decisions seeming opaque or arbitrary, creating a lack of trust, a sense of division between the leadership and the members, and a hindrance to the church’s ability to work together towards shared goals.

### **The Main Problem: Misunderstanding Biblical Offices**

While, according to Carver’s model, the board is explicitly responsible for linking the organization to its owners, producing governing policies, and ensuring organizational performance, he offers up a fourth category of optional products: “fundraising and legislative action.”<sup>12</sup> As he outlines the two optional areas, Carver adds the caveat of “defining the job in terms of the expected result rather than the means used to attain that result.”<sup>13</sup> However, when applied to the church’s functioning, Grudem writes, “[T]here is no New Testament precedent or support for such a form of church government.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, such a caveat gives way to a gray area in which the biblical testimony regarding how the church should function clashes with such a governance structure.

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<sup>10</sup> Peter, *Organizing for Ministry and Mission: Options for Church Structure*, 91.

<sup>11</sup> Carver, *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations*, 57.

<sup>12</sup> Carver, *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations*, 199-200.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 200.

<sup>14</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 1149.

### The Biblical Prescription

In defining the leadership of the church, Scripture is less descriptive than many theologians would prefer. Erickson concedes there is a “lack of didactic material” and that “[t]here is no prescriptive exposition of what the government of the church is to be like, comparable to, say, Paul’s elucidation of the doctrines of human sinfulness and justification by faith,” as well as “no unitary pattern” within the descriptive passages.<sup>15</sup> However, Erickson calls out that “[t]he only didactic passages on church government are Paul’s enumerations of basic qualifications for offices that already existed.”<sup>16</sup> These passages, 1 Timothy 3:1–13 and Titus 1:5–9, outline and define the two primary offices within the church’s leadership structure: elders (*episkopos*, also called overseers, pastors, or bishops<sup>17</sup>) and deacons (*diakonos*).

While both are vital for the church’s well-being, their functions are distinct. Elders are responsible for the spiritual oversight and teaching of the congregation (1 Tim. 3:1-7, Tit. 1:5-9). According to Cowen, “The role of the pastor-elder can be described under three separate headings. He is to be a teacher, a pastor, and a leader of the congregation.”<sup>18</sup> Deacons, on the other hand, are tasked with serving the practical needs of the church and ensuring the equitable distribution of resources (Acts 6:1-7, 1 Tim. 3:8-13). Clowney writes, “[D]eacons are assistants to the ministers of the Word, rather than officers charged specifically with the ministry of mercy.”<sup>19</sup> In their capacities, “they were responsible for caring for the physical needs of the congregation and doing whatever was needed so that the elders could focus on their work of teaching and shepherding.”<sup>20</sup> The apostles appointing seven men in Acts 6 indicates that the diaconal role is meant for service, being the hands and feet, instead of leadership, being the head. While the role of every believer is to participate in some fashion in these roles, the explicit officers who function as elders and deacons have been set apart directly for these functions.

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<sup>15</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1003.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> “[P]astor, elder, and bishop all refer to the same office. The terms are used interchangeably. Although the term *pastor* is commonly used today as the title for the spiritual overseer of a congregation, it was probably not intended in Scripture to be a title but to be descriptive of what an elder does.” Gerald P. Cowen, *Who Rules the Church?: Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 13.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>19</sup> Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church*, ed. Gerald Bray, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 213.

<sup>20</sup> Benjamin L. Merkle, “Ecclesiology in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 191.

### The Deacon And The Board Member

The role of the elder has remained in the policy-based governance structure. Yet, a careful examination of Carver's description of what the board does and what a deacon does makes it clear that the diaconal role has been truncated and eliminated in favor of the board model and its members. In many churches that have adopted policy-based governance structures, the distinct role of the deacons has become blurred, with the board assuming many functions traditionally assigned to the office. The board, often composed of individuals with business and management expertise, typically oversees the church's finances, facilities, and administrative functions. This "inadequate prescription," as Carver terms, falls in line with the board being more involved in executing the tasks they outlined in meetings.<sup>21</sup> This dynamic comes as a result of the church seeing their board members as more than just advisors and policymakers, as well as board members feeling compelled to contribute further in their official capacities, confirming what Peter writes when he says, "Many church boards, while attracted to the theory of policy-based governance with its clear lines of accountability and potential efficiencies, simply cannot make it happen in practice."<sup>22</sup> While this may seem efficient, it effectively sidelines the deacons and diminishes their biblical role. Foshee writes, "Gradually deacons were called on to handle more of the administrative work of the church. Oftentimes the deacons were the only elected church officers available to care for finances and property."<sup>23</sup> With a governing board effectively doing this work, the church that employs this model misunderstands the scriptural basis for how ministry should be done.

### **Biblical And Theological Foundations for an Alternative**

If the biblical prescription and the policy-based governance model are at odds, then what can be done? How can a biblically and theologically sound model be constructed to honor the scriptural mandate of eldership and deaconship, contextualize for modern application, and be flexible enough for future implementation to become an evergreen system, especially if there is leniency and scant definition on the matter within the Bible? After all, as Koffeman writes, "[C]hurch law always has to be ready to respond anew to changing circumstances: it is dynamic, human; it is never 'done,' always in a process from worse to better,

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<sup>21</sup> Carver, *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations*, 20-21.

<sup>22</sup> Peter, *Organizing for Ministry and Mission: Options for Church Structure*, 95.

<sup>23</sup> Howard B. Foshee, *Broadman Church Manual* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1973), 102.

because church law is a matter of ongoing obedience to Christ.”<sup>24</sup> Such an endeavor requires careful attention to reviewing descriptive passages for how the early church operated, as well as their application throughout history to see the practical outworkings and development of existing systems. While many ideas may be influential in building such a model, two key ideas have precedence: the priesthood of all believers and the body of Christ.

### The Priesthood Of All Believers

The first component to consider when constructing a sound model of governance is the concept of the priesthood of all believers, rooted in 1 Peter 2:9, which asserts that all Christians have direct access to God through Christ: “But you are a chosen race, *a royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (emphasis added). While God related to the Israelites through a chosen individual at different points throughout the Old Testament, with the coming of Jesus, the need for such an intermediary was no more, fulfilling the New Covenant promises of Jeremiah 30:31-34 that the law will be on the people’s hearts and that they will be God’s people. Akin writes, “Because all believers comprise the priesthood of the New Testament church, no particular group or individual may be interposed between any child of God and the heavenly Father. There is only one mediator between God and mankind, and that mediator is Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 2:5).”<sup>25</sup> Thus, the priesthood of the believer now characterizes the direct relationship he has with the Father.

In considering how to produce an alternative governing structure for the Church, this concept signifies that ministry is not relegated solely to a select few. Still, every believer is empowered to participate in the work of the Church. Storms writes, “As priests of God, we are not merely the passive building in which God dwells; we are also the active participants in worship... Just as OT Israel was to mediate God’s blessing to the surrounding nations (Gen. 12:3; Ex. 19:6), so the NT church, as priests of God, is to spread his grace and truth to a needy world.”<sup>26</sup> Historically, this principle has fueled movements of lay leadership and has challenged hierarchical structures that restrict ministry to a clerical class. As Akin expresses, “The priesthood of all believers was a major emphasis of the

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<sup>24</sup> Leo J. Koffeman, "The Ecumenical Potential of Church Polity," *Ecclesiastical Law Journal* 17, no. 2 (2015): 191.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Akin et al., *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004), 27–28.

<sup>26</sup> Sam Storms, “1 Peter,” in *Hebrews–Revelation*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. XII, *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 320.

Reformation of the sixteenth century. It was recovered by the Reformers to strengthen ‘an evangelical understanding of the church over against the clericalism and sacerdotalism of medieval Catholicism.’”<sup>27</sup> The priesthood of all believers emphasizes the inherent worth and giftedness of each member of the body of Christ, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and ownership in the church’s mission.

### The Body Of Christ

The next component to consider in building a sound model is what the New Testament writers consistently emphasize and point to in each epistle, that is, the importance of community and mutual edification within the body of Christ. The key texts in Paul’s writings that point to the interconnected, interdependent nature of the Church are found in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31; Ephesians 2:11-22, 4:1-16; Philippians 2:1-11; and 1 Timothy 5. Each passage points to this watershed understanding, which Sugden identifies: “It is meant to be a community that crosses the barriers that disfigure human society, barriers of race, class and gender, Paul in his epistles was clear that in the developing theological understanding of the early church, Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians had much to learn from one another. No part of the Christian church is meant to grow in theological isolation.”<sup>28</sup> With such an understanding, the Church’s members must play a vital role in how it grows and flourishes.

In formulating a church governance model that reflects the New Testament example, the corporate body of Christ, just like the individual priesthood of every believer, underscores the vital role of every member in the life and health of the Church. Just as a physical body functions optimally when all its parts work in harmony, so too does the church thrive when its members are actively engaged in fellowship, service, and mutual support. Paul’s statement to the Corinthians that “God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose” (1 Cor. 12:18) demonstrates the ordered, intentional nature of how the Church is structured in God’s economy, further supported in the mutual participation of both “suffering” and “honor” (v. 26) as a means of engaging in the work of the Church.

### **Solution: Plural-Elder Congregationalism**

Suppose every believer has a role to play in the life of the church and the Church itself is considered a body with ecological implications. In that case, the model of polity that arguably most exemplifies what Scripture presents is congregationalism, in which, as Patterson says, “[T]he principles of democracy in

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<sup>27</sup> Akin et al., *Perspectives on Church Government: Five Views of Church Polity*, 37.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Sugden, “Conferences and the Theological Process,” *Themelios* 16, no. 2 (1991): 9.

church government rest on the belief that Christ is the sole head of his church, the members are all priests unto God, and these units are regarded each as an outcrop and representative of the church universal.”<sup>29</sup> Whereas policy-based governance appoints board members to carry out the function of a deacon, making the church a corporation run by a select few, congregationalism creates a healthy, balanced, and reciprocal system that allows each voice within the local church to matter. Emadi writes of congregationalism, “[C]ongregationalists recognize the keys are not in the hands of the elders but in the hands of the local church—the particular assembly of justified sinners. This in turn shapes pastoral efforts and philosophy of leadership. Pastors do not make right decisions for the church, they teach the church to make right decisions for itself.”<sup>30</sup> Within the congregationalist model, the deacon is then returned to his rightful role as a “minister of mercy”<sup>31</sup> within the local church, allowing the elders to lead and guide within their qualified gifting.

### Single Versus Plural Eldership

Within congregationalism, the main question is not about the deacon’s role, as most agree on the lay position being one of providing practical, servant-minded assistance within the Church. However, the issue of single versus plural eldership is what drives the conversation and has been a topic of discussion throughout church history: should a single decision maker be standing as the leader of the Church, or should there be a group of qualified individuals of equal standing performing various tasks in tandem? In defending single-elder congregationalism, Patterson concedes that “a case for a single elder or the case for mandatory multiple elders, in my estimation, cannot be established on the basis of Scripture.”<sup>32</sup> However, when examining the full biblical example, Goncharenko concludes that, “[W]hen [elders] are mentioned in the rest of the Bible, the elders seem to be overwhelmingly referred to in the plural. Such is the case with the elders of Israel, every reference to whom throughout the pages of the Gospels and Acts is made in the plural. Thus, it is clear that although the Bible never specifies a precise number of elders for a local congregation, plurality is always assumed when they are

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<sup>29</sup> Paige Patterson, “Single-Elder Congregationalism,” in *Who Runs the Church?*, ed. Paul E. Engle and Steven B. Cowan, Zondervan Counterpoints Collection (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 135.

<sup>30</sup> Sam Emadi, “Teach, Wait, Repeat: How Calvinism Fuels My Commitment to Congregationalism,” *9Marks Journal*, Winter–Fall 1 (2019): 48.

<sup>31</sup> Cowen, *Who Rules the Church?: Examining Congregational Leadership and Church Government*, 114.

<sup>32</sup> Patterson, “Single-Elder Congregationalism,” in *Who Runs the Church?*, 150.

mentioned in the context of a leading body.”<sup>33</sup> With such evidence, plural eldership seems to be the most faithful option.

Historically, there have been many advocates for plural eldership, arguing that it provides greater accountability, wisdom, and stability in church leadership. Goncharenko writes, “[Charles] Spurgeon’s church, obviously a blessed and successful ministry even by the modern standards, had an order of elders who did not preach, but instead assisted the pastor in attending to the spiritual concerns of the congregation, leaving the deacons to look after the poor and the finances.”<sup>34</sup> In modern instances, a “ruling elder” or senior pastor sits above the plurality, with the leaders of various ministries within the church making up the governing body. Such a designation rests upon the biblical example, which Gilbert says, “God has a pattern of gifting and calling individuals to lead his people. That’s not to say it always works this way. Moses had his seventy, to be sure. But the seventy had their Moses, too. Joshua, the judges, the kings, the high priests—all are examples of God calling a single man to be the point-of-the-spear in leadership. [It] is a biblical pattern which is instructive.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, a plural elder structure, where multiple elders share the responsibility of shepherding the congregation, is the most biblically sound and historically supported model of church government.

Within a model of plural-elder congregationalism, the priesthood of the believer and the body of Christ, symbolizing the congregation’s importance and necessity in the life of the Church, meet with the appointment of a designated set of leaders to minister to and with said congregation. This unifying measure enables congregants and elders to work in tandem to accomplish the Church’s greater purpose of the Great Commission, to reach the world and make disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). Emadi’s equation of this relationship to car occupants is quite poignant when considering how each group should interact with one another:

You can think about the relationship between the authority of the elders and the authority of the congregation like the relationship between a steering wheel and an emergency brake. The elders have their hands on the steering wheel. They’re navigating the car and its passengers through winding, sometimes turbulent streets of this world. The congregation, meanwhile, sits in the passenger seat, trusting the elders to get them to the right destination. But if the congregation decides that the elders have made a seriously wrong turn or that they are about to run the church off a cliff, the congregation can pull the emergency brake.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Simon V. Goncharenko, Gene A. Getz, and Wayne Barber, *Church Government according to the Bible* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2014), n.p.

<sup>34</sup> Goncharenko, Getz, and Barber, *Church Government according to the Bible*, n.p.

<sup>35</sup> Greg Gilbert, “The Case for the Senior Pastor,” *9Marks Journal*, 2011, 31.

<sup>36</sup> Sam Emadi, *Who’s in Charge of the Church?*, Church Questions (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 38–39.

Greater and more expediently than any other model of governance, the plural-elder structure within congregationalism allows churches and their respective members, whether elder or congregant, to mirror the biblical witness and further the message of Christ.

### **Conclusion**

In closing, as local churches seek to maintain order and establish systems that allow them to carry out the function and purpose of the Church, the temptation to employ culturally successful methods of governance is all too appealing. Policy-based governance, which takes the board of directors' model and adapts it for use within a nonprofit setting, offers an appealing option where the lead or senior pastor can allow capable congregants to use their giftings to create structure and stability for the local church, making way for consistency, accountability, and administrative efficiency. However, in its application, the policy-based governance model has effectively ignored the biblical example and rendered the office of deacon null and void, overtaking the responsibilities set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-16 and making the church a corporation rather than a body of believers.

To adhere to the model that Scripture has commanded and demonstrated, churches that have adopted this model can revitalize their governance by returning to congregationalism, emphasizing shared leadership and congregational involvement. Looking to its elders for leadership and allowing the congregation to participate in what drives the church forward, this approach fosters a greater sense of unity and shared purpose within the local body. It enables members to feel as if they are part of something greater than themselves, allowing them to live out their individual priesthood as a believer within the corporate context. Ultimately, it returns the Church to what God intended it to be: a cooperative disciple-making entity that brings about heaven on earth.

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