

**FOUNDATIONS OF NONDENOMINATIONALISM**  
**COMMUNITY CHURCH 101**  
(updated January 26, 2024)

Assertions:

1. ON AGREEMENT WITH THE GLOBAL AND HISTORICAL CHURCH
  - a. Community Church is in alignment with historical orthodox Christianity, and most closely aligned with conservative protestant Evangelicalism,<sup>1</sup> as we celebrate that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is at the center of our faith-- and that this is good news for the whole world.
  - b. Community Church affirms that the Bible, as the inspired Word of God, is the final authority on all matters of faith and life, and that the Bible is clear and sufficient for all matters leading to salvation and a restored relationship with God. The Bible is the authority for all doctrinal and practical issues that arise in the governing and shepherding of the church.
  - c. We also recognize the role of the Holy Spirit in discernment, decision-making, and assisting the believer in understanding the Scriptures and interpreting them accurately. Such leading by the Spirit will never contradict what God has already revealed in His Word. We are called to test the spirits<sup>2</sup> to ensure they align with what God has already revealed in the Bible..

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the specific term "Evangelical" or "Evangelicalism", see <http://www.osguinness.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Evangelical-Manifesto-2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 4:1

## 2. ON DISAGREEMENTS WITHIN THE GLOBAL AND HISTORICAL CHURCH

- a. Inasmuch as we affirm the Bible's clarity and sufficiency for all matter leading to salvation, we also acknowledge that there are areas of Scripture where Bible-believing Jesus-loving Christians disagree. Such issues include, but are not limited to; the mechanics of creation; the practice of baptism, the metaphysical underpinnings of the Lord's Supper, the nature and continuation of spiritual gifts, roles, offices, and models of church government, and points of view on the end times.
- b. These kinds of issues<sup>3</sup> have formed the basis for divisions in the church throughout its history, and most notably since the Protestant Reformation as churches experience disagreement and split to form new denominations: gathering together with others who share their persuasions on contested interpretations of authoritative biblical texts, and considering those who disagree with them to be either apostate or somehow less biblical. The church has a shameful history of disunity and even violence, torture, and execution over such disagreements,<sup>4</sup> especially in the years immediately following the Reformation. Recent research estimates that globally, there are now over 45,000 Christian denominations.<sup>5</sup>
- c. In recent years, we have seen a tangible reduction in the animosity and exclusivity between denominations, specifically within the Evangelical movement around the world.<sup>6</sup> Evangelicalism as a movement celebrates a unity under Jesus as Redeemer and Lord of our lives and of His Church (global and historical) allowing for not just collegiality but actual partnership across denominations. This unity transcends denominational, national, cultural, and even racial differences.<sup>7</sup> This unity is increasingly understood as more important than the disagreements that have led to the rise of so many denominations in the post-Reformation era.

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<sup>3</sup> There are no shortage of issues that can split churches, and many (most?) of them have nothing to do with the Bible. The current discussion limits the conversation to divisions that arise from differing interpretations of what all consider to be the authoritative text.

<sup>4</sup> Read up on the Anabaptist movement, and how those who among the first to associate baptism with making a confession of faith (as opposed to infant baptism) were hunted down and executed for their beliefs.

<https://www.worldhistory.org/article/1932/zwinglis-persecution-of-the-anabaptists/>

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/research/quick-facts/> and scroll down to the heading, "How do you define a denomination?" The research was conducted in 2019.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/research/quick-facts/> and scroll down to the heading, "How do you define and count evangelical Christians?" The website currently (as of January 20, 2024) has a formatting error that puts this heading under the previous one, "What is your relationship with the Pew Research Center?"

<sup>7</sup> Globally, almost 85% of Evangelicals are non-white. Visit the Center for Global Christianity website at

<https://www.gordonconwell.edu/center-for-global-christianity/research/quick-facts/> and scroll down to the heading, "What is the ethnic makeup of Evangelicalism?"

### 3. ON HANDLING DISAGREEMENT OVER BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

- a. At Community Church, we acknowledge that Jesus-loving Christians who hold the Bible as the highest and final authority for faith and practice can and do agree on the primary issues of the Christian faith, affirming the following statement of faith:

The only true God, the almighty Creator of all things,  
existing eternally in three persons  
Father; Son; and Holy Spirit; full of love and glory.

The unique divine inspiration,  
entire trustworthiness,  
and authority of the Bible.

The value and dignity of all people:  
created in God's image to live in love and holiness,  
but alienated from God and each other because of our sin and guilt,  
and justly subject to God's wrath.

Jesus Christ, fully human and fully divine,  
who lived as a perfect example,  
who assumed the judgment due sinners by dying in our place,  
and who was bodily raised from the dead and ascended as Savior and Lord.

Justification by God's grace to all who repent  
and put their faith in Jesus Christ alone for salvation.

The indwelling presence and transforming power of the Holy Spirit,  
who gives to all believers a new life and a new calling to obedient service.

The unity of all believers in Jesus Christ,  
manifest in worshiping and witnessing churches  
making disciples throughout the world.

The victorious reign and future personal return of Jesus Christ,  
who will judge all people with justice and mercy,  
giving over the unrepentant to eternal condemnation  
but receiving the redeemed into eternal life.

To God be glory forever.<sup>8</sup>

- b. We also assert that Jesus-loving Christians who hold the Bible as the highest and final authority for faith and practice can and do disagree on secondary issues of faith. A secondary issue is one that is not directly related to salvation, and where the Bible doesn't address the issue directly, completely, or where the disagreement is a matter of application rather than interpretation. This doesn't mean these issues aren't of critical importance. They are! But we acknowledge that this disagreement in interpretation exists.

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<sup>8</sup> Borrowed from InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. See <https://intervarsity.org/about-us/what-we-believe>

- c. Community Church is an independent, nondenominational church that comes from Baptist and Methodist roots. While we consider ourselves to be participants in the global Evangelical movement, we do not benefit from being able to answer theological disagreements with a simple appeal to our denominational affiliation. But we also benefit because denominational affiliation can also lead to an imposition of theological assertions with which a given church may strongly disagree. We acknowledge the need for an even greater sense of mutual accountability within Community Church as we guard ourselves against drifting away from the authority of Scripture in any given area.<sup>9</sup>
- d. Community Church has identified three potential responses to encountering differences in interpretation and thus different theological positions on secondary issues:
  - i. First: We can decide definitively which of the theological options we will consider to be "correct" and exclude from fellowship those who disagree with our determination (essentially re-enacting the formation of a new denomination -- a denomination of one church). We can say, "This is the church's position on this issue, and if you don't agree, it might make more sense for you to find a different church." We don't think this option leads to the kind of unity Jesus prayed for in John 17.
  - ii. Second: We can avoid these controversies wherever possible by not talking about them, not teaching on those particular texts, and otherwise trying to ignore the areas of biblical disagreement. After all, doctrine divides, so the saying goes. It may be framed as setting aside doctrinal differences so we can "unite around shared religious experiences and our common love for Jesus."<sup>10</sup> We don't think this leads to the kind of unity Jesus prayed for in John 17, either, and it doesn't honor the biblical text where God has chosen to speak (even if on any given issue he never intended to provide the clarity we so desperately long for). In avoiding conflict, it should be noted that the absence of conflict is decidedly of less value than the presence of wholeness and unity. Also, many of these secondary issues directly impact how the church carries out its worship, its various ministries, and inevitably these differences will surface when least expected and a congregation that has not built a foundation for engaging in robust disagreement will be strained to remain whole.
  - iii. Third: We can engage in these disagreements as they arise, and do our best to create space for theological disagreement on secondary issues within a single church family. We affirm that bible-believing, Jesus-loving Christians can disagree on secondary theological issues and yet still do

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<sup>9</sup> This is one of the reasons we have a plurality leadership model at the church, so that groups of people are responsible for assessing biblical faithfulness, rather than an individual leader who could lead the church astray without sufficient accountability.

<sup>10</sup> Cowan, Engle. "Who Runs The Church: Four Views on Church Government." (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 9.

life together, worship together, and belong to the same church family together, but that it takes real humility, intentionality, a commitment to treating one another with dignity, and a commitment to the biblical text itself (and not just to our traditions or even what we may have been taught about the Bible) as the final authority in all things. We believe we can create a truly nondenominational environment where the church lands on a particular position, but allows a freedom of personal conviction among its membership within clear biblical parameters.

- e. Community Church has built a framework for understanding disagreement on secondary issues which acts as the foundation for our nondenominational identity. It is called the Range of Biblical Possibilities.

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#### 4. ON THE RANGE OF BIBLICAL POSSIBILITIES

- a. Community Church acknowledges that there can be a range of biblical possibilities when it comes to interpreting the authoritative biblical text on secondary issues. Some examples may be instructive:
  - i. baptism: bible-believing churches disagree, not on the need for baptism or Jesus' command to be baptized, but on the timing of baptism. Some practice infant baptism (paedobaptists), others practice believer's baptism (credobaptists). All parties argue their positions from the biblical text.
  - ii. end times: bible-believing churches disagree, not that Jesus has promised to return and create a new heavens and a new earth, but on the timing of his return. Some argue for premillennialism, that Jesus will return and inaugurate a one thousand year kingdom on earth before the final judgment; Others argue for postmillennialism, where Jesus returns at the conclusion of the one thousand years period of time and brings final judgment. Still others affirm amillennialism, which argues that the thousand year kingdom is a spiritual reality in which Christ reigns on earth in his church as a symbolic millenium, after which he will return and bring final judgment. All parties argue their positions from the biblical text.
- b. The assertion that this range even exists in the first place may be where individuals choose to disaffiliate with Community Church, rather than our specific position on any given issue. For some, the idea that the Bible lacks the precision and clarity to be categorically and definitively decisive on any of these secondary issues may itself be an idea that is untenable.
- c. If such an idea is untenable for a person, it may be that they are not best suited for participation at Community Church due to our intentionally nondenominational identity that will continue to present itself in problematic ways in the life of that individual. If the acceptance of a range of possibilities and the conversations that are part of our intentional nondenominationalism distract from discipleship and mission, and are an ongoing source of disapproval or frustration in the believer's life, it may be better for him or her to find a church with which they agree on as many of these secondary issues as possible. It is a higher calling to get on with loving and serving Jesus, and if conversations about secondary issues or the very idea that there can be a range of biblical possibilities for interpreting these issues is problematic and interferes with the more important goals of loving and serving Christ, then we can respect people's personal convictions and free them to denominational affiliation elsewhere.
- d. Note, however, the caveat that finding a church that "agrees with what you believe" can be a dangerous posture in itself, prioritizing a rampant individualism

and promoting your own personal biases and traditions and wishes over the accountability that comes with community discernment of the biblical text and Jesus' own call to unity amidst the diversity found within the body of Christ.

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## 5. PUTTING THE RANGE OF BIBLICAL POSSIBILITIES INTO PRACTICE

- a. There are some issues that do not significantly impact the life and practices of a local church body, and it is easier to maintain this range of biblical possibilities among Christians in our church who strongly disagree. For example, differing views on the mechanics of creation do not significantly feature in our gathering, worship, fellowship, or service as a church. One can hold to a literal 6 day 24 hour solar day view of creation and worship wholeheartedly and joyfully and in unity with someone who holds to the day-age view.
- b. These less disruptive issues are no less important in the grand scheme of things. Disagreements usually move up the ladder of abstraction, away from the specifics of interpreting the Genesis account and up to one's general posture towards scripture. Disagreements end up being on whether or not you take the Bible as the authority for faith and practice or not; e.g. if you disagree with how I interpret the Bible, you're not committed to the authority of scripture. So the framework for understanding the range of biblical possibilities is still necessary where there is this kind of disagreement, even for issues that are less visible in the daily life of the church.
- c. Some issues directly affect the corporate practices of the church, and trying to avoid holding any particular position is not practical or healthy for a church, undermining the church's understanding of important practices and theological convictions. Baptism offers a good example:
  - i. At Community Church, we can affirm that there is a range of biblical possibilities on the issue of baptism. While we affirm that baptism is not optional in the life of the believer because Jesus commanded it and it is unambiguously practiced in the New Testament churches, we acknowledge that bible-believing Jesus-loving Christians disagree on the practice of baptism. Some affirm paedobaptism while others affirm credobaptism. This is the range of biblical possibilities.
  - ii. We have to land somewhere on the issue so that our practices are consistent and so we can teach clearly on the issue. At Community Church, we practice credobaptism (believer's baptism) and only baptize people once they are of an age to understand the gospel, to confess their sins, and to put their faith in Jesus as their only salvation and their only way back into relationship with God. This is our practice because we believe it is the best reading of the biblical text. So we only baptize people when they reach an age where they understand the gospel and choose for themselves to follow Jesus.
  - iii. But we also accept baptisms of other denominations that practice paedobaptism (infant baptism) so long as it has been of continuing



significance in the life of the believer. As infant baptism is understood as entrance into the covenant community of faith, there are many cases where babies are baptized as either mere tradition or as a religious hoop that needs to be jumped through, while their families are not actually believing members of an active covenant community of faith. In these cases, we recommend shepherding a candidate through believer's baptism as an adult. Alternatively, though, if a life long faithful Presbyterian begins attending the church, and the baptism they received as an infant was of enduring significance throughout their lives as their families participated in a biblically faithful church, we celebrate that baptism and consider it valid and put no requirement for being baptized a second time according to fulfill the credobaptist tradition's requirements. They are able to be full participants in the life of the church without prejudice.

- iv. In this way, the church teaches from the front and practices a consistent credobaptist position on baptism, while welcoming individuals into our community who may disagree theologically on this issue. When we do teach on baptism, we also ensure that we present the range of biblical possibilities and we teach towards being a congregation that welcomes those who have a different biblical persuasion on the issue. We believe it is possible to worship side by side and experience true unity even across differences in the practice of baptism -- even baptism, which has such a violent history of disagreement, can be a place of understanding and peace.

## 6. ON DIFFERENCES THAT ARE NOT IMMEDIATELY APPARENT

- a. It can be said that the Sunday morning worship experience of Community Church is similar in tone, substance, and even duration to many, many other churches across the denominational spectrum, especially within western Evangelicalism. Often, new attenders choose to commit to a church based solely upon what they experience on a Sunday morning. There may be some theological reflection (evaluating the preaching), but while being a generalization, many people choose a church based on how it meets their felt needs rather than by exploring its doctrinal statement, evaluating its governing structure, and interacting with its stated mission in the world, its current vision, and any core values that have been articulated.
- b. It can also be said that churches tend not to put their doctrinal statements, their form of church government, their mission, vision or core values formally on display as often as perhaps they should. Community Church is no exception, and we have rarely, if ever, taught on our form of church governance with the exception of a few slides and a diagram during our membership class which runs approximately once every 20 years.
- c. As a result, people can begin attending Community Church and, since it may be very similar to the church they grew up in, or the church they're coming from, or the church they went to when they were a kid, or whatever their preconceived notion of church happens to be, they make assumptions about the doctrine, governance, and identity of the church. There is a superimposition of their understanding of their previous church experience onto Community Church. This can go on for some time, even decades, without being challenged in any way. As such, many people deem that a deeper reading and understanding of the core values and identity of a church are irrelevant or at best unnecessary at the moment.
- d. Eventually the church will make a decision or demonstrate some aspect of its biblical identity that has been consistently adhered to and lived out (yet as previously mentioned, not necessarily well communicated, promoted, or championed) with which an individual congregant may strongly disagree. This moment can be escalated by feelings of shock or betrayal, by accusations of manipulative leadership, even by accusations of being unbiblical. It is perceived to be a clear deviation from scripture and, even with tears of grief at the potential apostasy of the church, congregants object and do their best to guard the doctrine of the church through their disagreement. Alternatively, however, it may also be possible that these misunderstandings exist, not because the church has veered away from the Bible, but because the position of the church lies unexamined by the congregant and lies outside the prior experience or participation of the individual in any church that has held to a similar view.

According to the *previous* churches he or she may have been involved in, or according to a *presupposition* of a theological position as "the only legitimate biblical interpretation," the decision or practice in question is considered to be in contravention of the Bible.

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## 7. ON THE RESPONSIBILITY TO VOICE DISAGREEMENT

- a. We acknowledge that every church everywhere, and every human leader in every church is a sinner, redeemed by the grace of Jesus, and as such, leaders are still very capable of making errors in the interpretation of the biblical texts, just as we are able to consciously or unconsciously pursue personal agendas or lead manipulatively to accomplish ends that we desire. While Community Church purposely follows the biblical evidence suggesting that leadership is plural in the church, and we do so in part for the accountability that such plurality offers, it is always right and good for congregants, when they have concerns, to voice them to the leadership. Going further, congregants have a responsibility before God to do so.
- b. At Community Church, our leaders are also charged to take such concerns seriously, especially those regarding fidelity to scripture or patterns of behavior that are perceived as sinful (or that are sinful). Even when a leader disagrees outright with the concerns of a congregant, it is the responsibility of the leader to bring the concern before the Lord, and perhaps even share it with a trusted spiritual friend or fellow leaders, and ask if there's any part of the concern that is legitimate and that needs to be addressed, personally or as a church. Even in cases where no sin nor any departure from scripture is deemed to have taken place, sometimes even the appearance of sin or the appearance of a departure from scripture needs to be taken seriously as a potential step in the wrong direction or as something that might allow misunderstanding and hurt to develop in the church community. Leaders can learn so much from criticism or disagreement when it is expressed by congregants, and we need to welcome it.
- c. Congregants should guard, however, against gossip and slander before getting around to talking to the leadership of a given church. The Bible offers grave warnings about slander and speaking against church leadership. Congregants bear the responsibility before God to conduct themselves honorably and engage in dialogue with church leaders before spreading concerns about a doctrinal issue that may in fact turn out to be a misunderstanding in general, or an area of church governance that they have not been aware of, or even as we have been discussing above, an assumption that had been made regarding the church's polity, government, doctrine or practices that have been imported onto Community Church from the congregant's previous church context.

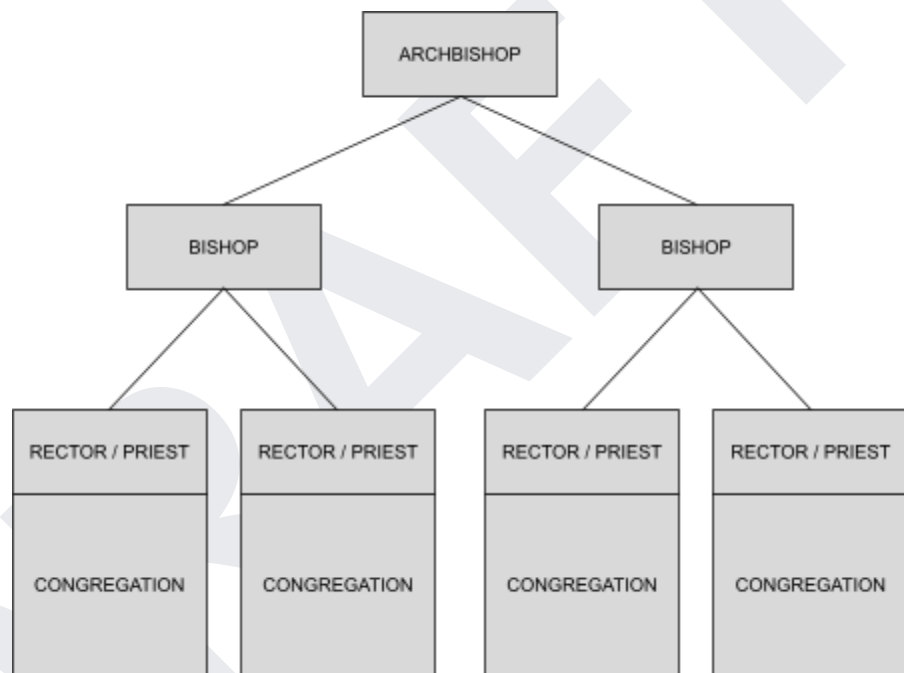
## 8. CASE STUDY: GOVERNING STRUCTURE

- a. At Community Church we acknowledge that the Bible does address governance and issues of leadership of the church, and as such, we strive to adhere as closely as possible to the biblical instructions and precedents that we see in both the Old and New Testaments, with an emphasis on the book of Acts and the pastoral epistles as they recount the time after Pentecost as God inaugurated the age of the Spirit and the priesthood of all believers.<sup>11</sup> We recognize that the biblical text includes direct didactic passages of instruction, narrative examples and precedents, as well as other texts (like greetings passages at the ends of Paul's letters) that contribute to a biblical framework for leadership.
- b. While we attempt to adhere as closely as possible to the biblical texts that address leadership of the church, we acknowledge (together with the majority of denominations) that God did not provide a clear organizational structure for his church. There are offices mentioned, there are leadership gifts identified, but it appears that the bible is far more interested in the heart and character of leaders than in prescribing any single organizational structure. We believe that God has allowed *some* freedom in how a church is organized, but that we should do everything we can to stay as close to the biblical texts as we are able as we work out leadership structure.
- c. We also acknowledge that church governance is an area of wide and vehement disagreement historically and globally (see discussion above on Disagreements Within the Global and Historical Church). Across Christendom, there is a significant "range of biblical possibilities" on how churches should be organized and governed. Some may be argued as more faithful to the text or less; others may be argued to take into account more of the texts than others. Each of the positions held by the various denominations is argued by its own proponents to be the closest adherence to the biblical evidence that we have.
- d. There are three primary models for church governance that can be identified among post-Reformation protestant churches today: Episcopalianism, Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism (in which we find single-elder churches and plurality-elder churches). Community Church fits *most closely* with plurality elder congregational churches, but we have prioritized different values from most other implementations of this model.

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<sup>11</sup> See 1 Peter 2:4-10 as an example.

- i. *Episcopalianism* is a model of government that can be considered hierarchical, or a top-down model of leadership. A local congregation has a rector as the leader of that church. A bishop oversees multiple rectors and thus multiple congregations in one geographical area, called a diocese. An archbishop oversees multiple bishops and thus multiple dioceses. Authority rests in the archbishop, and passes down to the local congregational level through a clearly established chain-of-command. It can resemble a CEO in a corporation, with officers of the corporation below it. This is the model of church that developed across the first five centuries of the early church, and was practiced up to (and beyond) the Protestant Reformation. Congregations often get little say in their leaders as they are assigned from above.



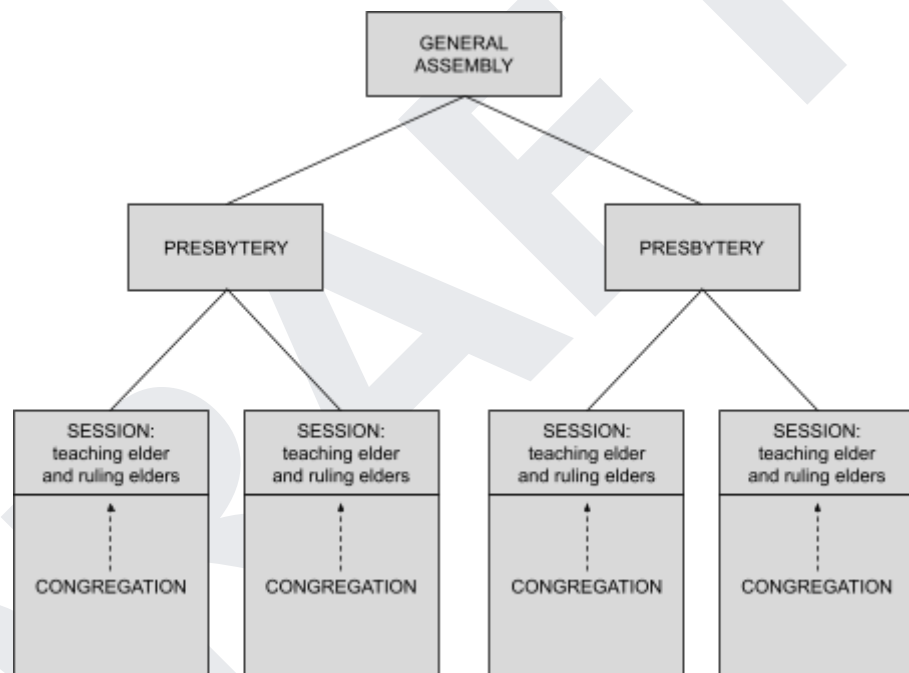
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Examples of churches with episcopalian forms of government include: the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Churches, the Anglican Church, the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, and some Lutheran churches.

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<sup>12</sup> Diagram adapted from Cowan, Engle. "Who Runs The Church: Four Views on Church Government." (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 12.

- ii. *Presbyterianism* is a form of church government where a local church is ruled by a group of elders, chosen by the congregation, that are called "a session." Members from the sessions of multiple churches in a given geographic area are part of the presbytery, which is the governing body that has ruling authority over its churches. Some members of each presbytery are also part of what is called a General Assembly which is responsible to govern the churches in the entire denomination. In presbyterianism, there are two types of elders: ruling elders and teaching elders (the teaching elders are sometimes called pastors). While elders are chosen by local congregations, once chosen, they form a top-down leadership structure where denominational authority is exercised over the churches beneath that governing structure.



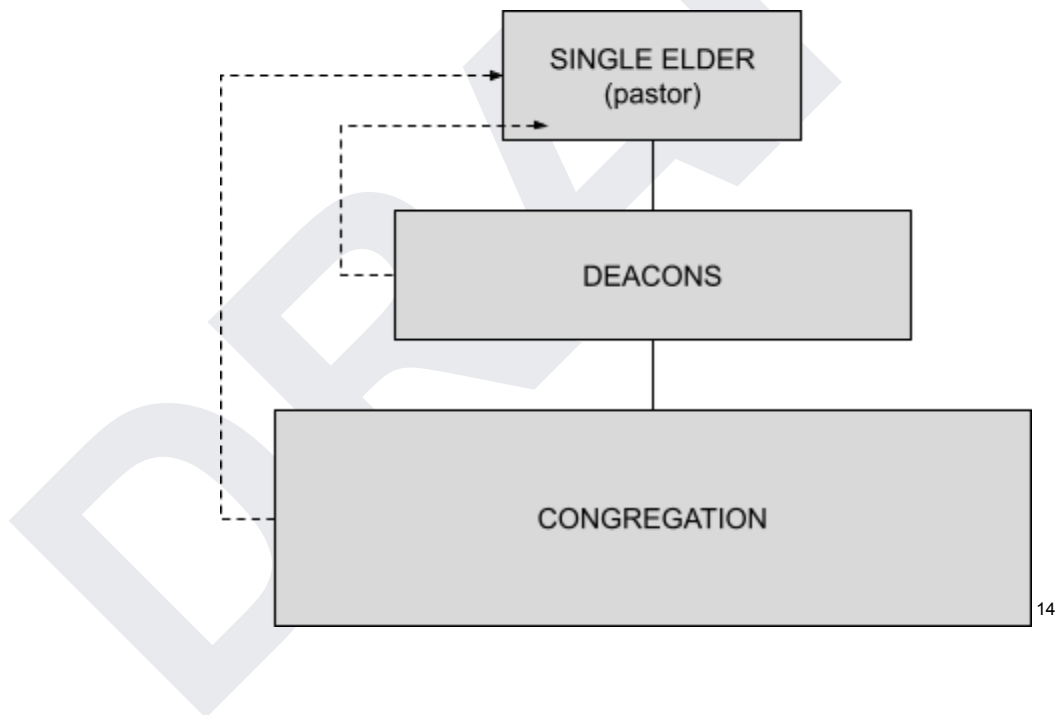
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Examples of churches with a presbyterian form of government include: the Presbyterian Church (USA), the Presbyterian Church in America, the Christian Reformed Church, and (not as rigorously adherent) the Assemblies of God.

<sup>13</sup> Diagram adapted from Cowan, Engle. "Who Runs The Church: Four Views on Church Government." (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 13..

- iii. *Congregationalism* is a model of church government where the local congregation is independent of external governing authority and retains local control over each church, and each church under the authority of Christ. Churches select their leaders from among the congregation, and select their pastors themselves. While there are many organizational structures among such independent churches, there are two primary implementations of congregationalism which cover the vast majority of cases.

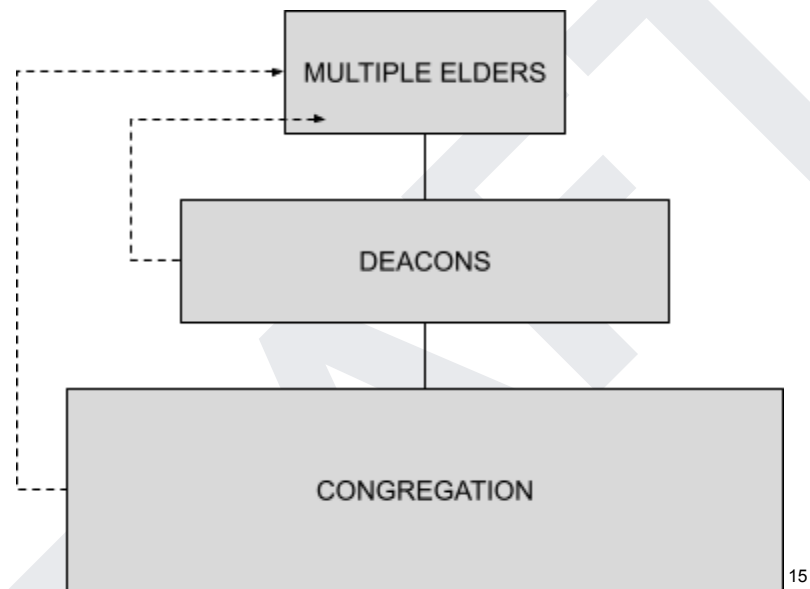
*Single-Elder Congregationalism* is likely the most prevalent model of congregational government in America. A local church is overseen by a single elder, usually given the title of "pastor" who is given primary authority over the church by the church. This form of government can also include multiple staff churches, but there will always be one senior pastor or lead pastor who is charged with the spiritual leadership of the church. The church also selects a group of other leaders to handle various other aspects of ministry, called the deacons.



<sup>14</sup> Diagram adapted from Cowan, Engle. "Who Runs The Church: Four Views on Church Government." (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 14.



*Plural-Elder Congregationalism* differs from single-elder congregationalism because it asserts that churches *must* have a plurality of elders overseeing a local congregation or else it is deficient. Additionally, the elders of a plural-elder church are considered to have equal authority over the church. These churches will de-emphasize having a single pastor or lead pastor in whom there is a concentration of authority conferred by governing structure. These churches usually also have a secondary leadership layer, called deacons, that provide leadership over specific areas of church ministry (often but not always involving mercy ministries and finances).



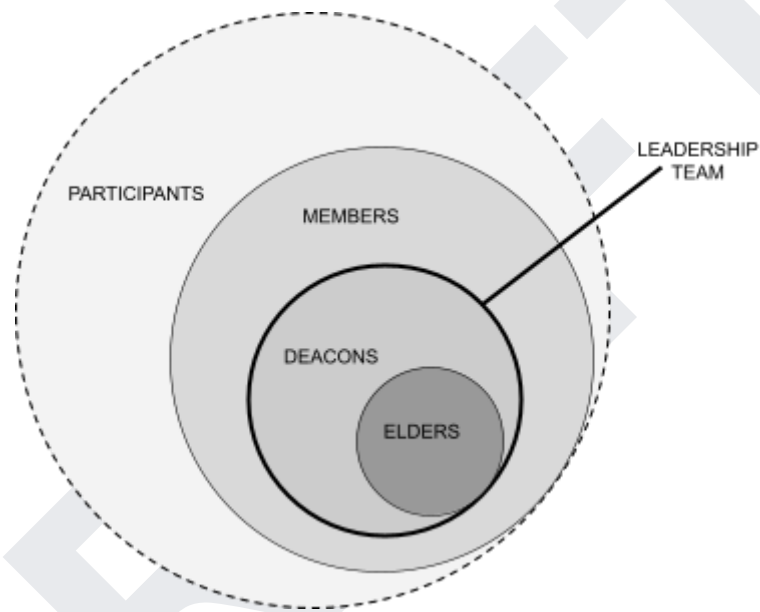
Some examples of congregational churches include Southern Baptists, General Baptists, and all other baptists, Churches of Christ, Bible churches, and all other independent churches.

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<sup>15</sup> Diagram adapted from Cowan, Engle. "Who Runs The Church: Four Views on Church Government." (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 15.

- e. Community Church has always been a church within the congregational tradition. We started as a single-elder baptist church back in 1863, growing into a plurality-elders-led congregational church as the size of the church warranted increased leadership representation. We became an independent church (left the baptist denomination) sometime in the 1920s when we merged with the local Methodist church here in East Gloucester. As such, our governing structure is most similar to plurality-elder congregationalism, with some distinctive features based on our core values as a church.

#### Leadership Structure of Community Church:



- i. Eldership: Our church is governed by a team of elders, volunteers affirmed by the membership of the church, each with equal authority as overseers of the church. Based on our position on headship in the church,<sup>16</sup> eldership is reserved for men as a tangible expression of the transcultural biblical instructions on male headship. The elders share the governing responsibility for the church, and oversee the life and ministry of the church in the areas of doctrine, discipline, direction, and development of our staff team and our deacons.
- ii. Deacons: Our church is led by a second team of volunteers: individuals that have demonstrated a genuine relationship with Jesus, significant gifts of leadership, and a heart for Community Church and have been affirmed for leadership by the congregation. Referring again to our position on

<sup>16</sup> You can find our position paper on gender and headship on our church website: <https://www.eastgloucester.org/nondenominationalism>

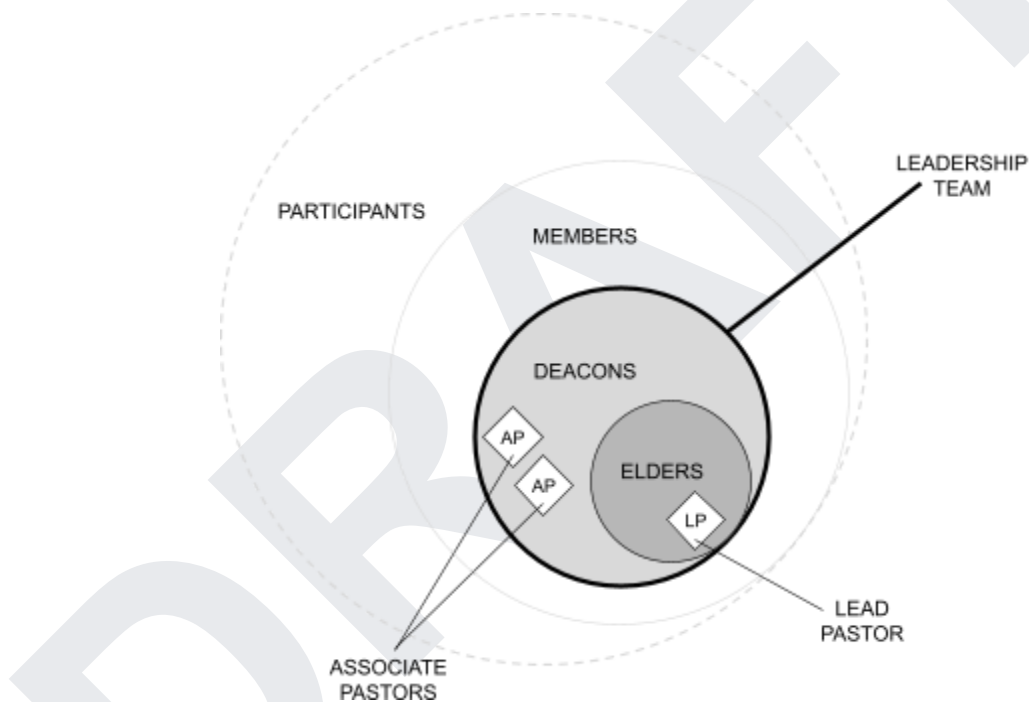
headship in the church, deacons can be both men and women who are gifted for leadership and have shepherding gifts appropriate to the role. They accept responsibility for various areas of ministry with hands-on leadership and resourcing, and together with the elders, work to provide shepherding care for the congregation as a whole. We haven't been using the word "deacons" in many years, but biblically this is the role that they fulfill.

- iii. Leadership Team: Community Church holds to the core value of collaboration, especially in our leadership teams. We bring the elders and the deacons together into a combined ministry group called the Leadership Team where they work together in meaningful relationships to love and serve the church. The elders are responsible for leading this team from within the team itself. As a team, the elders and deacons work together and are responsible for the day to day practical decision-making and leadership of the church. The Leadership Team handles everything from approving new ministry initiatives to affirming partnerships with community organizations, to providing accountability to the church's various ministry teams. It is responsible to pray for our whole church, and to address specific needs in our church community. We also charge our Leadership Team with the shepherding care of the church, sharing the task among a larger group of people with shepherding gifts.

## 9. STAFFING AT COMMUNITY CHURCH

- a. While we value and champion volunteer leadership at Community Church, we also recognize the need for dedicated vocational leadership -- people who can dedicate their time and energy to leading the church. Our church hires people with the education, theological training, and shepherding/teaching gifts to minister to our congregation and equip them for life and ministry.
- b. We don't hire staff to do ministry for the church, but rather, we hire staff to equip the church to do the ministry she is called by God to do, both within the congregation and out in the world. Accordingly, our staff are specifically hired to lead by equipping members of the congregation to identify and employ their unique God-given gifts to build up the church, and to empower them to live out God's call on their lives for His glory.
- c. Confusion about the word pastor: This word can cause confusion, mostly because other churches with forms of governance different from ours employ the word differently from the way we do, and differently from one another.

- i. Often the word pastor refers to an individual with singular governing authority over the church, who leads through all significant decisions -- the pastor as the CEO of the church and representative of the voice of God to the congregation. This is not the case at Community Church.
- ii. Our "pastors" are those we have freed up from needing to hold down a different job to provide for themselves and their families so they can dedicate their time to leadership in various roles at Community Church. They receive the honorific title "pastor" based on their education, theological training, and specifically the spiritual gifts of shepherding and teaching that they have and which they employ for the benefit of the church as they come on staff in any of a number of roles that have varying levels of governing authority.



- d. Lead Pastor: Community Church is led by a plurality of elders, and our Lead Pastor (lead shepherd) is a full time paid elder who has been freed up from having to hold down another job to provide for himself or his family in order to dedicate himself to the ministry needs of the church. He leads the elders team from within the team, and carries no more and no less authority in the church than the other members of the elders team. Additional relational influence will grow over time with individual congregants and families as he ministers to people who give relational authority to him over a lifetime of ministry together, but ecclesiologically all of the elders have equal authority as overseers in the church.

- e. Associate Pastors: We also hire people as vocational deacons, or in our current language, vocational Leadership Team members. The title of Associate Pastor (associate shepherd) is reflective of the spiritual gifts of shepherding and teaching that are affirmed for the Leadership Team under the oversight of the elders. As members of the Staff Team, they work together with the Lead Pastor and under his direct oversight to meet the day-to-day ministry needs of the church. As vocational members of the Leadership Team, they help to lead that team from within the team, and help to equip and empower other leaders.

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