

## **What does it mean that Bethel is an Elder-led church?**

The model of an Elder-led church comes from Ephesians 4:11-13, which says, *“And He (God) gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”* In the context of the New Testament church, the word shepherd refers to overseers, or elders, whose job it is to shepherd the flock of God. In this model, there is a plurality of leadership consisting of pastors and elders who share responsibility for leading the local church, as well as for teaching, leading, nurturing, and training God’s people to mature in faith and knowledge, and to carry out the work of the ministry. At Bethel, the senior pastor is an elder, but also reports to the other elders. By having the leadership decentralized among the elders, the risk of misguided leadership by any one man is minimized.

According to I Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, elders are to be men of mature faith, holy (which means set apart for God’s purposes), sober-minded, self-controlled, gentle, disciplined, humble, hospitable, above reproach, committed to their families, free from the love of money, able to teach, and respected in the community. In this model, then, the Lord Jesus leads the local church through the elders, who are able to sense His leading because they are spiritually mature men of the Word and of prayer. At Bethel, our constitution lays the responsibility for the selection of elders, including the senior pastor, ultimately with the congregation. So, every year at the annual business meeting, elders are elected by the Bethel membership to a three-year term of service, having been nominated and vetted by the existing elders prior to their names appearing on the ballot. Moreover, a congregational vote is required in the hiring of the senior pastor, who then automatically becomes an elder.