

Case Study

Church Name: Coral Hill Baptist Church

Pastor's Name: Ray Woodie

City/Town: Glasgow

What were your motivations in making this transition?

Two factors:

- Growing demands of both the physical and spiritual needs among the fellowship. Increasing the number of deacons to help in “serving tables” and elders to help shepherd the flock.
- Biblical conviction that a plurality of elders creates greater accountability among leadership and provides more effective and efficient platform to address the spiritual needs of counseling, teaching, and leading the fellowship.

What steps did you take in the process?

This was a three-year process:

- We spent a year with current leadership (deacons/staff) exploring whether a plurality of elders and elder-led model had biblical grounds. We explored the historical precedence among Baptist congregations as well as the practical advantage a plurality of shepherds would bring to the table.
- The next year was a time of addressing questions among the church as to the reason and reasonableness of elders. It was important to us that our current deacon body be in strong support and thereby voice what motions would be made to move the church in this direction.
- The final year was identifying who would be serving as elders among our staff and membership. We needed to clarify roles and articulate who made decisions within the fellowship. Embracing a congregational form of polity, the church held the decisive vote on matters of budget, staffing, and leadership roles.

What challenges or hurdles did you face?

- Continual clarification of roles and responsibilities. We were not replacing leadership, but rather adding an additional layer and distinguishing the difference between servant leadership and shepherd leadership. What responsibilities did elders/deacons share and what were unique to their call and giftings (teach, guard doctrinal integrity, address conflict among the sheep).
- Clarify the role of staff elders and lay elders. We needed to address the differences from those who are on staff under the management of the lead pastor and whether their voice would carry the same weight as other elders.
- Helping the congregation to see the elders as a biblical and practical expression of ministry in their own history (they have always had at least one elder/pastor since 1903) and in their own lives (willingness to seek out any of the elders for specific spiritual needs).

What were the benefits of this transition?

- The burden of ministry is shared, whether in times of difficult decisions or in preaching and teaching responsibilities. Needs among the fellowship are addressed more quickly, collaboration of both vision and direction are affirmed and strengthened, as well as more accountability among leadership.
- There is no lapse in leadership. Where it has been necessary for one elder to step away or move on to another field, there is not the absence of continuity at the helm.