

AN ELDER- LED COUNCIL MODEL FOR CMBC

by Pastor Tom Allen

What Are Some Possible *Objections* to an Elder Board at CMBC?

1. *We are unaccustomed to this form of spiritual authority—it is more comfortable—in the short term—to do our own thing.*
2. *We may not have enough willing people to make this happen.*
3. *Some may fear ‘spiritual abuse’ by elders because of a chronic mistrust of church leaders in the past at CMBC.*
4. *This would seem to require a major adjustment to the constitution, and there may not be time to accomplish this before the new pastor comes.*
5. *The role of women would be a concern because by definition, an “Elder” (biblically speaking) is a male.*
6. *The congregation, along with individual members, may feel like its “voice” or its “power” will be stripped away by an Elder leadership model.*
7. *The present “Pastoral Support” committee would need to be reexamined if an Elder board is created.*
8. *If all of our present boards and committees were functioning as they should be, we would not need Elders.*
9. *Some think that the “Board of Deacons” was tasked with spiritual leadership, home and hospital visitations, etc. No one is presently serving in this role.*
10. *When the church had elders, there were times when the elders were in serious conflict with the pastor and/or staff members—resolving these kinds of conflicts would need to be addressed.*

How Can We Respond to the Above Potential Objections?

1. *We are unaccustomed to this form of spiritual authority—it is more comfortable—in the short term—to do our own thing.*
There was a time when CMBC did have Elders, so there is some ‘history’ here for that model. It is true that CMBC has drifted into a very independent mindset where people have become accustomed to ‘doing their own thing.’ But we should never ask first if something is “comfortable”—the first question is always—“Is it Biblical?” As the next section of this document indicates, the concept of an Elder board is eminently Scriptural.
2. *We may not have enough willing people to make this happen.*
Again, the important question is not—“Will we have enough people,” but rather—“Is this God’s will that we institute a Board of Elders?” If the answer to that second question is yes, the first inquiry becomes moot. As I will demonstrate later in this document, we may need as few as 3-4 elders to make this new governance model work. Our task now is to begin praying for the right men to step up when asked.

3. Some may fear 'spiritual abuse' by elders because of a chronic mistrust of church leaders in the past at CMBC.
As CMBC has noted, there is the "potential" for "spiritual abuse" regardless of the governance model that is adopted. Some in the congregation would no doubt feel that the present Council (including the one just prior) have committed and are committing "spiritual abuse" against former staff members. I would submit to you that there is less of a chance of spiritual abuse when adopting the Elder Board concept because these men will be held to the Titus and Timothy standards for Elders. At present, it is difficult to apply those biblical standards to the Council because those standards were to be specifically applied to male elders.

4. This would seem to require a major adjustment to the constitution, and there may not be time to accomplish this before the new pastor comes.
If the people of CMBC are convinced that this is a "God thing," there will be sufficient time to put this in place before a new pastor comes. Much depends on our ability to anticipate potential objections and provide biblical, logical reasons to move forward in this direction.

5. The role of women would be a concern because elders are to be male.
I will demonstrate later in this document how CMBC will still be able to incorporate women in leadership while maintaining a plurality of male elders. I believe that Godly women have something very special to contribute to the leadership process, and my desire is to include them in the new leadership model.

6. The congregation, along with individual members, may feel like its "voice" or its "power" will be stripped away by an Elder leadership model.
It will be pointed out that although this is a "shift in authority," the congregation will still maintain a voice through: (1) Voting elders and Council members into leadership; and (2) Regular "Open Forums" led by the Pastors and Elders (quarterly perhaps) when decisions and direction can be discussed. I think it is important for the congregation to come to terms with the biblical emphasis on "obeying spiritual leaders" (Hebrews 13:17) and to "accept the authority of the elders" (I Peter 5). Nowhere in Scripture does God's Word say that we are to "accept the authority of the congregation" or "obey the congregation." True "spiritual leadership" and "spiritual authority" should never be about power or manipulation. Again, in I Peter 5, we read—"As a fellow elder, I appeal to you: Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you...Don't lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example." A minister friend of mine says that the problem in the church today is that "everyone wants a vote—no one wants to submit."

7. The present “Pastoral Support” committee would need to be reexamined if an Elder board is created.

It would be the intention to disband the notion of a “Pastoral Support Committee” as the Elders would, in fact, assume that role in every sense of the word. We would take this time of change to also make the point that our present “Pastoral Support” concept morphed into an unbiblical abuse of principles clearly taught in Matthew 18. This is not an indictment on the present or past members of that committee, but congregants began to use this group to make complaints about the pastor that should have first been directly communicated to the pastor himself by the congregant. Then—and only then—if the congregant was unsatisfied with the pastor’s response, the congregant should approach the elders with his or her concern (based on clear steps outlined in Matthew 18.)

8. If all of our present boards and committees were functioning as they should be, we would not need elders.

Based on clear Scriptural teachings listed both above and below, there is simply no way to get around the fact that the writers insist that we are to “Appoint elders in each town” (Titus 1:5). Instituting an Elder element to the Council structure is not a matter of “efficiency” as much as it is a matter of following Biblical guidelines. But I would argue that when this is done right, the inclusion of Elders will also be a much more efficient model for spiritual governance at CMBC.

9. Some think that the “Board of Deacons” was tasked with spiritual leadership, home and hospital visitations, etc. No one is presently serving in this role.

The very fact that there has been such confusion about the so-called “Board of Deacons” and the fact that no one is serving in this capacity serves to demonstrate the need to elect Elders—because there are no questions about their role in the church as clearly defined in the New Testament. I can totally understand why there has been such disarray surrounding the term “Deacon.” God’s Word seems to indicate that “Deacons” serve more on the “business” side of the church if you will—handling finances, caring for the physical property of the church, etc.

10. When the church had elders, there were times when the elders were in serious conflict with the pastor and/or staff members—resolving these kinds of conflicts would need to be addressed.

It should be immediately pointed out that the cause of this conflict was not because the church had Elders. There could be any number of reasons for this conflict. In my experience as a Lead Pastor, I have had Elder boards that were completely unified toward the goal of becoming a Great Commission, Great Commandment

congregation—our meetings were pleasant and exhilarating. I have also had the experience of an Elder who chose to be cantankerously carnal. Great care will need to be taken in the selection of Elders for this very reason. The Lead Pastor needs to have a very strong voice in who is selected for these key positions whenever possible. (In our present situation, assuming we can put an Elder team in place before the end of this year, obviously the new pastor will not be able to have input.) The nominating committee will need to do everything within its power to make sure that the nominees for Elder are compatible with the Lead Pastor and his staff. This is not to imply that we are looking for “rubber-stamp, yes-men”—rather, we are looking for the right “temperament.” How does the Elder-candidate handle disagreement and disappointment? What kind of track record does this brother have in terms of anger and gossip—along with the other traits listed in Titus and Timothy? Being able to “disagree, agreeably” may be the single most important trait for pastors and elders. There will always be disagreement on a leadership team—that’s a given—the key is always how those disagreements get handled on a regular, ongoing basis.

Why Should This Be Done?

Reason # 1—CMBC Has a History with an Elder Board

As recently as Pastor Rudy’s tenure, CMBC did have functioning elders. In this way, the concept is not “new.”

Reason # 2—Council is An Antiquated Approach

The present “Council” format of leading CMBC is antiquated and does not connect with current, more biblical and practical trends for church governance.

Reason # 3—Council Lacks Biblical Authority

The Council does not either have, want, or exercise spiritual authority at CMBC, and I think I know why. Biblically speaking, Council has no “spiritual authority” without elders being appointed. This is why the answer to our dilemma cannot be to just “choose better Council members.” Frankly, I have much respect for our present Council leadership team. But consider God’s Word on this—

*Paul and Barnabus appointed **elders** for them in each church, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in Whom they had put their trust. (Acts 14:23)*

*Appoint **elders** in each town as I have instructed you. (Titus 1:5)*

These texts, along with the “Elder Qualification” passages (Titus 1:5-9, I Timothy 3:1-11) clearly demonstrate that every church should have a functioning “Elders” team or board. Spiritual authority comes with that role—

*Obey your **spiritual leaders [elders]**, and do what they say. Their work is to watch over your souls, and they are accountable to God. (Hebrews 13:17)*

*As a fellow **elder**, I appeal to you—Care for the flock that God has entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. Don’t lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your own good example. . . In the same way, you younger men must accept the authority of the **elders**. (I Peter 5:1-3 + 5)*

*Then they went from town to town, instructing the believers to follow the decisions made by the apostles and **elders** in Jerusalem. (Acts 16:4)*

*So guard yourselves and God’s people. Feed and shepherd God’s flock—His church, purchased with His own blood—over which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as **elders**. (Acts 20:28)*

*Are any of you sick? You should call for the **elders** of the church to come and pray over you, anointing you with oil in the name of the Lord. (James 5:14)*

I submit to you that a mere “Council” cannot assume or expect to exercise genuine “spiritual authority” in the way that appointed Elders can and should based solely on what the Bible says in these passages. Although the finer details of church governance are *not* spelled out in the New Testament, one thing is extremely clear—“*Elders*” are to be leading the church.

Reason # 4—The Candidates for Our New Lead Pastor Will Most Likely Come From Churches That Had Functioning Elders

We often think—somewhat narcissistically—that when we select a new pastor it is a one-way street where we are looking him over. In reality, the candidate is also researching CMBC and examining whether or not this seems like a “fit” for him and his family. I think an Elder board would be an attractive, huge draw for any candidate considering the role of Lead Pastor here at CMBC. This would likely be something to which he is already accustomed, and he would see this as an important source of moral and spiritual support. Most pastors view elders as fellow-servants and team members—a similar sentiment would be difficult to feel toward a Council that, for reasons discussed already, does not deal in spiritual authority.

Reason # 5—An Elder Team Provides An Appropriate Structure for Practicing Biblical, Restorative Church Discipline

I can think of several outbursts that have been reported to me in congregational or annual meetings that would have clearly called for “Church discipline.” The person (or persons) were clearly operating outside of Scriptural guidelines, and it would have been a perfect occasion to practice the right kind of discipline. Although it is true that some of the offenders did just leave after they did their damage, it is possible that some of these brothers or sisters could have been restored to fellowship even after their unGodly behavior. At the very least, even if they still left the church, both parties (the church and the offender) could have experienced reconciliation and therefore would have been able to bless each other. I am thinking of one particular case where the offending party left without (a) Being challenged about his unChristlike actions or (b) On his own making things right with God and the congregation before he left. Just the notion of an elder team that is also recognized as the “Church Discipline Committee” would be a deterrent to some of the carnal behavior that has been tolerated to date.

How Could an Elder Board Fit Into CMBC’s Present Leadership Structure?

In an attempt to work within your present leadership structure, I am suggesting a continuation of the term “Council” and the office “Council Member” with this modification—Council would be elected in such a way that there is always a *plurality of voting elders*. For example, if we found 3 eligible men who were willing to serve as elders, there would be a need for 2 “at large” Council members thus preserving the “plurality” of elders as a Council. If we found 4 elders, we could have 3 at large Council members.

I would envision the Elders having their own separate meetings once each month called by the Chairman of the Elders to: (1) Discuss spiritual issues within the church; (2) Consider potential disciplinary action(s) that may be needed; (3) Hear the concerns, progress reports, and prayer requests from the pastoral staff; and (4) Consider any other matters that may fall under the purview of the elders.

[NOTE: Appendix A for revisions of the 2013 Constitution and Bylaws of CMBC in the light of an elder team being added to Council to be developed]

[NOTE: Appendix B for revision of page 15 in the present 2013 constitution to be developed]

[NOTE: the Lead Pastor and any full-time staff members would also be considered “elders” but because of their non-voting status, they would not “count” in terms of the necessary plurality—this is why I used the phrase “*plurality of voting elders*.”]

What Role Would the Lead Pastor and Staff Have in an Elder Board?

Your present constitution reads—“*The responsibility of leading the church is entrusted to the Church Council. It does not reside in one person (i.e. Pastor or Moderator) but in the plurality of discerned and trusted leaders. **The Lead Pastor is a pivotal, fellow leader, and so is a leader of leaders.***” [Bold: mine]

Clearly, the Lead Pastor and any full-time staff members would be “elders” in the most Biblical sense of that word. I am sure that you have your reasons—perhaps both practical and historical—for not giving the pastors a “vote” in leadership decisions. In my tradition (The C&MA), the Lead Pastor is the voting Chairman of the Board automatically when he becomes the pastor unless he chooses *not* to be, and then he would assume the role of “Vice Chairman,” and he would still have a vote. Although staff members do not typically “vote” in the C&MA structure, the Lead Pastor *is* a voting member. It would not be my intention to overturn decades of tradition to introduce the notion of a Lead Pastor who is a voting member of the leadership team. I could, however, hope that it would be prayerfully considered. In any case, the model introduced (above) operates under your present assumptions about non-voting pastors. I do appreciate the sentiment expressed in your present constitution stating that the Lead Pastor should be considered a “*leader among leaders.*”

Keeping all of this in mind, the Lead Pastor and full-time staff would attend and contribute to all Elder meetings but with no voting privileges. It would be my hope that the elders would carefully consider the input of the pastor and his staff especially remembering that the Lead Pastor is to be treated as “*a leader among leaders.*”

Elder Team Ministry Job Description Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church

The role of the Elder at CMBC can seem so daunting and so nebulous at times. Do I really measure up? What do I possibly have to offer? What exactly does an Elder do? These are common questions that are asked by present and potential elders. Therefore, while not an exhaustive explanation, the following might be helpful to map out a description to aid the Elder in their ministry role.

Ministry Position: Elder

Accountability: To the rest of the Elder Team, to Council, & to the congregation

Term: 3 years. An Elder at CMBC may serve up to 2 consecutive terms before stepping down for at least one year.

Ministry description:

Spiritual

- By virtue of the role outlined in the Scriptures (e.g. I Timothy 3, Titus 2), it is expected that the Elder have a growing relationship with the Lord evidenced by regular time spent in the Word, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines that aid in a disciple's spiritual growth.
- A regular attender of worship services at CMBC.
- In leading by example, one whose walk with the Lord is an encouragement to others.
- A faithful and generous financial giver to the ministry of CMBC. This attribute will probably be evidenced in other areas as well.

Family

- If married, the Elder must take time for their wife and family encouraging them, blessing them, praying for them, and spending time together. Serving well at home is a pre-requisite for serving the church family (I Timothy 3:4-5).
- Additionally, it is critical that one's wife be supportive (prayer, emotional) and appropriately engaged in the ministry of her husband. It is very difficult to serve CMBC as a married Elder with the effectiveness needed if one's spouse is either not supportive, not engaged, or views the role as "his thing." This will be made clearer as more practical tasks are outlined below.

Practical

- Understand fully and be a strong advocate for the mission, vision and values of CMBC. Where things are uncertain, arrange a time to meet with the Lead Pastor who can bring clarity. Understanding the vision and core ministry values of CMBC will go a long way in addressing ministry issues and needs that arise over time.
- Attend regular Elder Team meetings as scheduled for the purpose of training, prayer, oversight of ministry direction/issues, and assignment of tasks. These are generally monthly meetings with a break in the summer months. Elder Team meetings are only part of an Elder's responsibilities. In between meetings, much of the hands-on "eldering/shepherding" must be taking place.
- Periodically, extra-ordinary meetings are planned to address specific issues (eg. marriage challenges from within the church, theological issues, ministry objectives) that need more time, prayer, or study.
- As a part of the Elder's life, the demonstration of hospitality to the church family should be evidenced (1 Timothy 3:2). Basically, being "hospitable" means to be friendly with others. It is sharing one's life with others. In a culture which values individualism and "me-ism," cultivating meaningful community with others is paramount. This may take the form of initiating "coffee times" with other men, meals, or dessert evenings with singles, couples, or families. Demonstrating hospitality should always be for the purpose of building "one another" up through encouraging conversation, blessing, and prayer. It is through authentic and warm relationships that an Elder is given the opportunity to serve and minister to the church family. Hospitality is not about how big or well decorated our homes are or how well we can cook. Hospitality is all about offering whatever is yours to others in an authentic manner, inviting others into your life and loving them. Making hospitality a part of a married Elder's life requires teamwork between husband and wife to systematically plan, arrange, invite, and execute.
- Visiting the sick and shut-in person is something that an Elder must be prepared to do and occasionally will be asked to do by the Pastor. Depending on the nature of the person who is ill, hospital visitations generally do not have to be very long (15-30 minutes) but they should demonstrate care, concern, and praying for the one who is sick or recovering.
- Praying for the sick is a ministry task that is part of the role of the Elder (James 5:14-16). Elders at CMBC are regularly asked to pray for those who are experiencing significant health concerns. Using the New Testament example of James as our guide, we always agree to pray for an individual when people ask. We prepare our hearts and confess sin in advance asking the same of the individual. We acknowledge that God is the Healer and submit to His power. We anoint the person with oil. We do ask for healing, and then we leave the results with God.

- When confronted with individuals in the church family who are not upholding Christ-like attitudes or behaving in ways that negatively affect the greater ministry of CMBC, the Elder will be called to lovingly confront. The goal should always be restoration of the individual to personal spiritual health and the approach should always be humble (I Peter 5:2-4, I Timothy 5:1-2). When faced with individuals within the church family who are in conflict, Elders will need to be prepared to intervene and help resolve conflict. When Elders are approached by individuals in the church family who want them to “fix” problems they are having with others, Elders need to be prepared to turn them back towards those with whom they are in conflict (Matthew 18:15-17). Elders must be very wise in how they respond to those who are venting frustration or “concern” about other people, ministry objectives, theological issues, or pastoral staff. It is critical that an Elder has clarity on many of these aspects of church life and can deal well with church family related to these matters.
- An Elder should be able to listen well to the concerns and needs of others and respond appropriately with empathy, compassion, sound biblical instruction, and prayer.

General

- An Elder may have certain spiritual gifts or interests that engage them in other parts of the ministry and exploring these should be encouraged as the individual has time or energy. However, the ministry role of the Elder does require significant input of time, energy, and prayer when done well.
- It is a positive asset for an Elder to be visible and engaging in the life of people. Elders should not cocoon at worship gatherings/large ministry gatherings or retreat to their personal friendships. Rather, these are prime opportunities to encourage, build up, and seek out people who have gathered.
- An Elder should avail themselves to meet occasionally with the Lead Pastor for the purpose of encouragement, teaching opportunities, assignment of tasks, and prayer.

Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task (I Timothy 3:1).

The Role of an Elder-Council Member at CMBC

From the New Testament Scriptures (I Timothy 3-6, Titus), several definitive conclusions can be made about the role of spiritual leaders within the local church. First, the Scriptures place high value and priority on personal character. There is not so much an emphasis on what the spiritual leader does as there is on who they are. This is our first indicator that as we discern our church leaders, Godly individuals who have demonstrated spiritual maturity in their lives are the number one priority. The reason is simple. We lead primarily from our character and if our character is out of sync with biblical expectations, we lead people in the wrong direction and fail to “be” the kind of people God wants us to be. Second, according to I Timothy 5:17, spiritual leaders “manage the affairs of the church” and “shepherd the flock.” What exactly does that mean? In a broad sense, spiritual leaders provide spiritual leadership and elevate the overall vision before the local church. How does this look practically?

1. Elders are called to be individuals who pursue the “**being**.” First and foremost, let’s strive to emulate New Testament characteristics in **who** we are.
2. Elders are called to **pray**. Let’s pray for ourselves, our spouses, our children, our community, and our church family/ministry.
3. Elders are called to **oversee the ministry** of CMBC as a team where some have a fulltime pastoral role while others have a lay role but we lead as a team. Additionally, pastoral staff are under the authority of the Elder Team.
4. Elders **champion the vision** of CMBC, use it as their guide, and initiate strategic ministry plans concerning the direction of the life of the church family.
5. The Moderator of the Elder Team works closely with and in conjunction with the Lead Pastor ensuring ministry plans, strategies, and goals are pursued. Additionally, the Moderator in conjunction with the Lead Pastor will ensure the implementation of consistent staff evaluations and the preparation of Annual/Semi-Annual Meetings.
6. Elders are called to **build warm relationships** with ministry leaders and more generally the church family. Specifically...
 - ✚ Elders should have a good grasp of God’s Word so that they can build others up and speak truth into their lives.
 - ✚ Elders should pray for others and find opportunities to pray with them and their team. Work with them to find good solutions to their needs.

- ✚ Elders should encourage ministry leaders in their areas of service. Be a cheerleader for them, write a note, extend a word.
 - ✚ Elders should connect with people and be hospitable. Your home should be a source of warmth and care for others. Get to know others, their ministry needs, joys, and challenges.
 - ✚ Elders should listen well. Cultivate open communication with others so that dialogue, evaluation, and feedback are encouraged and not hindered.
 - ✚ Elders should live out a life worthy of being followed (spiritually, ethically, morally, sexually, financially).
7. An Elder's being, prayer life, and relationships with church family (Ministry Leaders, newcomers, long timers) enables them to pray, think, plan, and discern with sensitivity and intelligence when they come together for their regular meetings.
8. On a ministry level, an Elder's primary role is to keep the **Big Ministry Picture** in mind, empowering others to serve and not micro managing them. This encourages a culture of service and trust in contrast to stifling volunteers. If it is not morally, ethically, or spiritually harmful to the ministry, Elders should allow Ministry Leaders to provide leadership to ministry endeavors. Elders do not have to get into all the "nuts and bolts" of a ministry area to stay connected. They will love you for it and find far greater joy in serving! And besides, God has given CMBC many people with many gifts to build the kingdom.

Discussion Questions for Prospective Elders

Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church

It is our desire to continually raise the nature of the leadership role in a positive way. We want to encourage every prospective elder to take this seriously because as the leaders go, so go the church. The discussion with prospective elders and their wives should be led by current elders. This should be a warm, encouraging interaction allowing for the couple to respond to the following areas:

Marriage/Family

1. Describe your marriage and family relationships. How has your view of family and marriage been shaped? Who have been influencers and role models for you over the years? What have been some of your challenges in your marriage and family and how did you work through them? What have been some of your highlights? How have your children shaped you as a follower of Jesus and parent?
2. How do you process conflict in your marriage and family?

Spiritual Disciplines

1. Describe your own relationship with the Lord. What disciplines are important to you and why?
2. In what areas in your relationship with the Lord do you struggle?
3. What do you and your spouse do together in the area of spiritual disciplines and what do you separately (prayer, Bible reading, spiritual discussion, etc.)?
4. How do you approach the discipline of giving of your financial resources? What are some of the key biblical elements for you that guide your thinking in this discipline and how is that worked out in your family, the church, community, world?
5. What would you like to work at in the next year in terms of spiritual growth?

Leadership

1. What is your understanding of spiritual leadership within the home and in the church family? On what do you base your understanding? How has this understanding been shaped?
2. If you could describe the role model leader within the life of the church, how would they be characterized? Of those characteristics you noted, what are ones that you feel you now possess and what are ones that you feel you need to grow in?
3. What are some of your personal feelings about the direction and ministry of CMBC currently? Do you resonate with where we are going?
4. How do you shepherd others as a spiritual leader?
5. What role does hospitality play in your life and family?
6. What do you believe you can bring or contribute to the increased effectiveness of our Elder Team?

Your Questions for Us

Next Steps

1. Based on this conversation, we ask the prospective elder to take 2 weeks to pray about it and then we will follow up with them by asking if they feel positive about moving forward.
2. Assuming there are green lights, presentation of these individuals for affirmation would happen at the next election.