**LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE GUIDE**

**For Search Committees**

Purpose: Help your committee clearly identify and document how your church currently governs itself. This clarity protects both your church and potential pastoral candidates by ensuring alignment on leadership philosophy and practice.

Time Required: Two 90-minute committee meetings

**MEETING ONE: CURRENT STRUCTURE**

**Opening Discussion (10 minutes)**

Why does this matter? Before you can find the right pastor, you need to know what kind of leadership structure he'll be stepping into. A congregational Baptist and a reformed elder-led pastor operate very differently - both can be biblical, but they need to match your church's identity and expectations.

**Section 1: Bylaw Basics (20 minutes)**

Work through these questions as a committee:

* When were our bylaws last revised? (Check the date on your current bylaws)
* Who has a copy? Where are they kept?
* Do our bylaws reflect how we actually operate today?
* Are there things we do regularly that aren't in the bylaws?
* Are there things in the bylaws we don't actually do anymore?

Committee Decision: Do we recommend a bylaw revision during the interim period?   
☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Needs more discussion

**Section 2: Decision-Making Authority (30 minutes)**

Discuss and document:

Business Meetings

* How often do we hold business meetings?
* What decisions require congregational vote?
* What percentage of members typically attend?
* Who can vote? (Members only? Attenders? Age requirements?)

Pastor's Authority

* What decisions can our pastor make without committee or congregational approval?
* What decisions does he need approval for?
* Does he have authority over staff hiring/firing?
* Does he set the direction, or does he implement direction set by others?

Deacon/Elder Role

* What do we call our lay leaders? (Deacons, Elders, Leadership Team, other)
* How are they selected? (Congregational vote? Appointed? Term limits?)
* What authority do they have?
* Do they lead, serve, or both?

Committees

* What standing committees do we have?
* What authority does each committee have?
* Who appoints committee members?
* Do committees make decisions or make recommendations?

**Section 3: Where We Land (20 minutes)**

Based on your discussion, where does your church fall? Read through each model and check the one that best describes how your church actually operates.

**☐ Traditional Baptist Congregational**

Congregation:

* Votes on all major decisions (budget, staff, property, ministry direction)
* Final authority on all church matters
* Calls and dismisses pastor and staff

Committees:

* Operate most ministry areas
* Make decisions within their area
* Report to congregation

Deacons:

* Serve practical needs of church and members
* Support the pastor and congregation
* No governing authority

Staff:

* Implement decisions made by congregation and committees
* Manage day-to-day operations
* Report to committees or congregation

Pastor:

* Provides spiritual leadership and teaching
* Recommends direction but congregation decides
* Called by and accountable to congregation
* One voice among many in decision-making

**☐ Modified Congregational**

Congregation:

* Votes on major decisions (budget, property, calling staff)
* Trusts leadership for most operational decisions
* Less frequent business meetings

Committees:

* Mix of decision-making and advisory roles
* Some committees operate independently, others recommend to leadership
* Fewer committees than traditional model

Deacons:

* Serve practical needs
* May have some oversight responsibilities
* Advisory role to pastor and staff

Staff:

* Significant operational authority in their areas
* Lead ministry rather than just implement
* Report to pastor or personnel committee

Pastor:

* Provides strong directional leadership
* Makes most operational decisions
* Brings major decisions to congregation
* Primary leader but not sole authority

**☐ Elder-Led Congregational**

Congregation:

* Votes on major decisions (budget, property, elder affirmation)
* Affirms direction set by elders
* Active but trusts elder leadership

Committees:

* Minimal committee structure
* Most committees are advisory only
* Ministry led by staff and elders, not committees

Deacons:

* Serve practical needs of church and members
* Handle mercy ministry, facilities, and logistics
* Support the elders and congregation
* No governing authority

Elders:

* Qualified by 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1
* Function together as collective pastoral leadership
* Provide spiritual oversight and direction
* Make most ministry and directional decisions
* Multiple elders share shepherding responsibilities

Staff:

* Led and supervised by elders
* Significant authority in their ministry areas
* Report to elders, not committees

Pastor:

* Functions as teaching elder or lead elder
* Part of elder team, not sole leader
* Primary preaching and teaching role
* Provides direction with other elders
* Accountable to elder team and congregation

**☐ Elder-Led (Reformed)**

Congregation:

* Affirms elders and major constitutional decisions
* Limited voting authority
* Trusts elders to govern
* May vote on membership and large financial matters only

Committees:

* Very limited or no standing committees
* Ministry teams led by staff, supervised by elders
* Advisory groups only if they exist

Deacons:

* Serve only - no governing role
* Handle practical ministry (mercy, facilities, logistics)
* Selected by and accountable to elders
* Support the elders' leadership

Staff:

* Hired and supervised by elders
* Lead their ministry areas with elder oversight
* Report to elders only

Pastor:

* Recognized as lead or senior elder
* "First among equals" with other elders
* Primary teaching role
* Shares governing authority with elder team
* Accountable to other elders

**☐ We're somewhere in between or hard to categorize**

If you checked this box, write a few sentences describing what makes your structure unique:

**iHomework Before Meeting Two**

Each committee member:

* Review our written bylaws (if you haven't already)
* Think about: Is there a gap between what our bylaws say and how we actually function?
* Consider: What would surprise a new pastor about how we make decisions?

**MEETING TWO: DOCUMENTATION & RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Opening (5 minutes)**

Any new insights since our last meeting?

**Section 4: Governance Clarity (30 minutes)**

Create a simple one-page description of your church's governance:

**Our Church Governance at a Glance**

Decision-Making Structure: (Write 2-3 sentences describing who makes what kinds of decisions)

Pastor's Role & Authority: (Write 2-3 sentences describing pastoral authority and limitations)

Lay Leadership Structure: (Write 2-3 sentences describing deacon/elder role and selection)

Congregational Authority: (List what decisions require congregational vote)

Our Leadership Philosophy: (Write 2-3 sentences about whether you lean traditional Baptist, elder-led, or somewhere between)

**Section 5: Pastoral Implications (30 minutes)**

Based on your governance structure, discuss:

What kind of pastor fits our structure?

* Do we need someone comfortable with strong congregational authority?
* Do we need someone who can lead decisively within our structure?
* Do we need someone experienced with elder governance?
* Do we need someone who can help us transition? (If so, to what?)

What should we tell candidates about our governance?

* What will they need to know upfront?
* What might surprise them?
* What tensions or transitions are we navigating?

Red flags to watch for:

* Candidates whose governance philosophy conflicts with ours
* Candidates who want to change our structure without church agreement
* Our own lack of clarity about what we want

**Section 6: Recommendations (20 minutes)**

As a committee, what do you recommend?

Regarding Bylaws: ☐ Our bylaws are current and accurate - no action needed ☐ We recommend minor updates during interim ☐ We recommend comprehensive bylaw revision during interim ☐ We recommend bylaw review after new pastor arrives

Regarding Governance Clarity: ☐ Our governance is clear and well-understood ☐ We need better communication about how we govern ☐ We need to address gaps between bylaws and practice ☐ We need congregational conversation about governance philosophy

Regarding Pastor Search: ☐ We are clear about what leadership style fits our church ☐ We need to discuss this further before interviewing candidates ☐ We are open to different leadership styles ☐ We need help defining what we're looking for

**Closing (5 minutes)**

Next Steps:

* Finalize your one-page governance description
* Submit recommendations to the appropriate church body
* Include governance clarity in your pastoral profile
* Use this information when evaluating candidates

Remember: There's no single "right" way to govern a Baptist church. Your goal is not to be more reformed or more traditional - your goal is to be clear about who you are so you can find a pastor who fits.