

Hunter Bible Church

Policy on Appointment and Removal of Elders and Advisors (2011)

Policy Background

Our church has been operating for some time with a policy on appointment of elders that was developed in 1998. Since that time, in God's mercy, the church has grown, and the elders have decided that it would be a good time to confirm what our policy should be in light of our current understanding of the Bible and the present situation of the church.

Biblical Background

Models of leadership

We have given a lot of thought over the last few years to the leadership structure of our church. It seems fairly clear that there is no one uniform model for "church government" in the New Testament. We know that the church is Christ's church, not that of the leaders. The role of an elder at HBC is to act as a shepherd to the flock of God at Hunter Bible Church, keeping watch over the spiritual welfare of God's people and leading the church as it seeks to glorify Jesus in Newcastle (1 Peter 5:2, Heb 13:17, Acts 20:28-32). In addition, we appoint advisors who are not otherwise qualified to be elders, but who meet regularly with the elders and provide advice and counsel from their perspective.

Roles of Men and Women

All humans are equal, but we have different roles, just like our Triune God. The persons of the Trinity have differing authority, but the same value. Likewise, men and women have different roles, but the same value before one another and before God. We see this reflected primarily in marriage and in the church. In the Bible we see that just as Paul teaches male headship in the family, he teaches male headship in the local church (1 Tim. 2:8-3:7). Because the family is the basic social unit and the man is the established family authority, we should expect that men would become the elders of the larger church family. We will normally, however, have at least 2 women as advisors to the elders.

Staff and Non-staff elders

In general we see the role of the Senior Pastor as that of providing overall pastoral leadership for the church, and in particular being responsible for overseeing the vision and direction of the church as it seeks to glorify God in Newcastle and elsewhere. The role of the pastoral staff as a whole is to proclaim the gospel and equip the saints for the work of ministry and building up the body of Christ at Hunter Bible Church (Eph 4:12). The role of the other elders is to assist in pastoring to ensure that the values of the church, and its Biblical basis, are adhered to in overall decision-making, and to provide wise counsel to the pastors. The elders as a body, both staff and others, are automatically members

of the Committee of Hunter Bible Church Association Inc, and hence are also responsible for managing the legal affairs of the church.

Our aim is that the elders group will be a mix of staff and non-staff members of the church, but that in general and wherever possible there will be more non-staff members of the group than staff members.

The reason for having staff as elders is that where decisions are made affecting the big issues of church, staff, being involved in the ministry in a full-time capacity, can see the practical implications of decisions as well as bringing godly wisdom to bear. The reason for not having a majority of staff on the elders is that it seems wise to have something of an "independent" view on matters, and that it is possible to foresee that staff, whose paid employment may depend on the view of the senior pastor, might sometimes be reluctant to disagree with the senior pastor. Of course we pray this would never be an issue, but it seems sensible to have some of these safeguards built in to the system.

Procedure for Appointment and Removal of Elders and Advisors

A. Procedure for appointment and removal of elders

In the following, a reference to a "member" of the church is a reference to a person who is a member of Hunter Bible Church Association Inc ("the Association").

Note: this policy does not form part of the Rules of the Association, but is intended to function as the "applicable Hunter Bible Church policy" in relation to elders referred to in clause 7(b) of those Rules.

Start of process

1. The process will be initiated normally either:

(i) by the end of the term of an existing elder or elders; or

(ii) by the existing elders seeing a need to increase the number of elders by reason of workload or for some other reason.

Suggestion of Candidates

2. A candidate for eldership will be approached by the elders to decide whether they are willing to be considered as a candidate, or will be a continuing elder whose term is about to expire and who expresses a willingness to continue to serve as an elder for another term.

Nomination of Candidates

3. The existing elders will nominate the candidates for appointment. Where an elder who is currently serving wishes to serve for a further term, this will need to be approved by a majority of the other serving elders (including those whose terms are also about to expire.)

(i) If the elders have agreed that a person ought to be nominated, they should make any enquiries they consider necessary to satisfy themselves that

the candidate fits the agreed criteria in clause 6, and then

- confirm that the person is willing to be nominated; and if so
- publicly nominate the candidate to the church for appointment as an elder.

(ii) The appointment procedure should be separately followed in relation to each position on the eldership that is vacant or about to become vacant.

Ballot for Affirmation by Members of the Church

4. After a period of at least one month has passed since the public nomination of the candidate by the elders, a ballot of the members of the church should be taken. The candidate will be regarded as suitable for appointment as an elder should they receive positive support from 75% or more of the members of the church who take part in the ballot and express a definite view on the candidate's appointment. Should a candidate receive less than 75% of the votes, they will be regarded as not being suitable for appointment in that round of appointments.

(i) To be clear, the appointment of elders at HBC is a matter for the existing group of elders, and does not automatically flow from the ballot. The purpose of the ballot is to allow the members to express their affirmation of the person's appointment and to allow major objections to be made clear, if any. However, the ultimate decision as to appointment of elders for the future lies with the group of elders whom God has placed over the church at the particular point in time. A matter which came to light as a result of the ballot process may mean that the elders decide not to appoint a candidate, even if they have received 75% approval.

(ii) The one month period prior to the ballot should be used by members of the church to pray about and consider the appointment. In that time, if they are aware of matters that would disqualify the person from appointment, they should (privately but openly, not anonymously) bring those matters directly to the elders. They may also draw such matters to attention on the ballot paper, as noted below.

(iii) If, as a result of the above process, matters come to light which persuade the elders that the candidate would be unsuitable for appointment, the candidate's nomination should be withdrawn. A candidate may withdraw their own nomination at any time for any reason. Withdrawal of a nomination after announcement may of course happen for a number of reasons, and should not be seen as a reflection on the nominee's character.

(iv) The ballot will take place after the one month period. To allow maximum coverage of the church, the ballot should be conducted at the church's regular Sunday meetings over two successive Sundays. Notice of the ballot may be given in the same way that notices of meetings of the Association may be given. The ballot should be private in the sense that ballot papers are to be privately filled in, but it will not be totally secret, in that each member of the church will be asked to put their name on the ballot paper. Space for comment on

the ballot paper should be allowed. If it becomes necessary then members of the church may be approached to explain their decision further.

(v) The ballot paper should provide the following three options for each candidate:

1. "Yes, I support this person's appointment as an elder";

2. "No, this person is unsuitable for appointment as an elder for the following reasons OR I am willing to be contacted to clarify my reasons";

3. "Abstain: I do not know this person well enough to express an opinion."

(vi) Indication in the ballot should relate specifically to each individual candidate, and not be a ranking between two or more different candidates.

Term

5. The normal term for an elder is 2 years. This is subject, of course, to the right of an elder to resign at any time if they feel it is appropriate to do so, or where it becomes necessary to remove an elder under clause 7 below.

In the event that an elder or advisor vacates office (otherwise than

- by the completion of his or her term of office, or
- by removal under clause 7)

the remaining elders may appoint a member of the church to fill the vacancy. The member so appointed holds office, subject to these rules, until the expiry of the term of appointment of the other elders and advisors following the date of his or her appointment.

Criteria for Appointment as an Elder

6. The following criteria apply to appointment as an elder at Hunter Bible Church:

(i) An elder should satisfy the requirements spelled out in the New Testament for elders, especially in passages such as 1 Tim 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9, 1 Peter 5:1-3, Heb 13:17, Acts 20:28-31. To be clear, it is the policy of Hunter Bible Church that only men can be appointed as elders, as all elders should be qualified, if called upon, to teach the word of God to the church (though not all will do so regularly).

(ii) An elder should be committed to the doctrinal statement of the church, and the aims and goals of the church, and to any Position Papers adopted by the church.

(iii) A person should normally have been a member of the church for a year before becoming an elder.

(iv) Members of the same immediate family should not be part of the elders/advisor's team at the same time.

(v) The senior pastor should automatically be a member of the elders so long as he holds that position.

(vi) Other members of the staff should be nominated and appointed as elders in accordance with this policy.

Grounds for Removal of an elder

7. The grounds for removal of an elder are:

- (a) gross misconduct that brings the Christian faith and the church into disrepute, or
- (b) persistent and wilful teaching of, or firm adherence to, views which are contrary to the teaching of the Scriptures on a central issue of the faith (including, but not limited to, the matters dealt with in the church's Statement of Faith), or
- (c) persistent unwillingness to promote the mission of the association, or
- (d) irreversible mental or physical incapacity leaving him incapable of fulfilling his responsibilities as a member of the elders, as certified by 2 suitably qualified medical practitioners who are not members of the church; or
- (e) a resolution calling for his removal, passed with a 75% majority by a meeting of church members. (While such a meeting would not be a general meeting of the Association, it should be called and conducted in accordance with the Rules governing general meetings of the Association.)

Procedure for Removal of an elder

8. If it becomes apparent that one of the elders ought to be removed on one of the grounds set out in clause 7, the senior pastor shall establish a process where the elder concerned has a chance to address these issues. If the senior pastor is himself the elder concerned, three of the other elders shall establish the process, which must be approved by a majority of the whole group of elders.

(i) If it is established to the satisfaction of the majority of the elders that one of the grounds set out in clause 7 has been established, then

(a) the elder concerned may, if the matter does not involve proven unrepentant sin, choose to resign;

(b) if such sin is involved, however, then the HBC Discipline Procedure should be used.

(ii) In cases where use of the Discipline Procedure is not appropriate, and the elder concerned does not agree to resign, then after giving one month's notice of the motion to the elder, and an opportunity to that elder to respond to the charges, that elder may be removed from office as an elder by a majority vote of the other elders.

B. Procedure for Appointment and Removal of Advisors

9. An advisor is a member of the church who is not otherwise qualified to be appointed as an elder, but whose role is to give advice to the elders.

(a) Normally advisors will meet with the elders at all elders' meetings, and will have full rights of comment, but will not have voting power.

(b) The appointment and removal of advisors will take place in accordance with the procedures outlined above for appointment and removal of elders, with the exception of clause 6(i). However, church members need to be clearly informed of the different roles expected of the two.