

## Leadership Positions at Nansemond River Baptist Church

This document is intended to serve as a guide for understanding the various offices, titles, and leadership positions at Nansemond River Baptist Church. We affirm in our statement of faith, core beliefs, and core values that there are only two Scriptural offices of the church: elder and deacon. However, various local churches apply differing functions to these offices and other leaders exist outside of these two offices within our congregation. This guide provides a general overview of the office and function of these two offices as well as a description of the other ministry leaders at NRBC.

### Elders

Elders serve as the spiritual leaders of our congregation. Also known as pastors or overseers, the elders collectively lead, feed, and guard our church (1 Peter 5:1–3).<sup>1</sup> Only biblically-qualified men can serve as elders of our church (1 Tim 3:1–7).

Some elders, usually called "vocational pastors," receive some or all of their financial compensation through church employment (1 Tim 5:17, 18).<sup>2</sup> These pastors handle most of the day-to-day work of the elders and much of the regular teaching and preaching.

As one of the vocational pastors, the lead pastor is the most visible and congregationally vocal of the elders. He most often speaks for the elders when communicating with the congregation. While he is viewed as the leader of the elders and the church staff, he has no particular place of authority on the elder council.

Non-vocational elders are pastors not employed by the congregation. Because they have vocational duties outside of the church, they are less involved in the church's day-to-day operations but have an authority equal to that of the vocational pastors.

Together, the elders of our church comprise the elder council, sometimes called the elder board. While our by-laws do not require all of our active vocational and non-vocational elders to serve on the elder board, most of the time, they all do. Even if one or more vocational elders are not on the elder board due to the vocational to non-vocational ratio requirements found in our by-laws, these elders still participate in elder board meetings. They simply do not have a vote when decisions are made.

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<sup>1</sup> Since 2008, NRBC has clearly stated in our constitution and by-laws that elder, pastor and overseer are different titles for the same office. For years, we had a footnote in our by-laws clarifying our position because it was not clear in our official statement of faith which is the Baptist Faith and Message 2000. However, the Baptist Faith and Message 2000 was amended on June 14, 2023 by action of the 2023 Southern Baptist Convention to clarify that pastor, elder, and overseer are the same spiritual office. See <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/> Article VI.

<sup>2</sup> An elder is considered "vocational" if he is compensated in any way for the work of ministry. This compensation could be full-time, part-time, or some other financial arrangement.

## **Deacons<sup>3</sup>**

Deacons lead church ministries that meet our congregation's tangible, organizational, and mercy needs. Only biblically-qualified men and women can serve as deacons of our church (1 Timothy 3:8–13).<sup>4</sup> While the individual ministries led by deacons are under the spiritual authority and oversight of the elders, deacons operate with some level of independent administrative authority. They do so in order to free the elders from the burden of these responsibilities.<sup>5</sup> Because deacons lead their ministries with a degree of independence, the congregation should elect those serving as deacons. Deacons are not ordained, do not teach as a part of their official function, and only practice administrative, not spiritual, leadership.

There is no deacon council or deacon board at NRBC. Our deacons do not operate as a deliberative or decision making body in any way. They do meet collectively a few times a year to discuss their ministry assignments. However, an elder oversees this meeting and reports and concerns back to the elder council.

## **Ministry Team Leaders**

Ministry team leaders lead church ministries under the authority and supervision of an elder. These leaders are directly or indirectly "downstream" from the pastoral work of one or more of our elders. Ministry team leaders are tasked with implementing our church's mission and vision in a specific area of our congregation. Their authority to lead in these areas of ministry are derived from the elder who oversees that area of our congregation's work. The elders are ultimately responsible for how the mission and vision of our church is implemented in all areas of ministry.

Using the general principles for Christlike leaders in Scripture, the elders should only appoint men and women as ministry team leaders who demonstrate an appropriate level of Christian character and maturity. Some ministry team leaders will teach regularly in connection with their role. In cases where that teaching involves the ongoing biblical instruction of men, for instance, in a co-ed small group, the supervising elder will only ask a man to fill the role (1 Tim 2:12, 1 Cor 14:34). In all other cases, the position can be filled by someone of either gender.

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<sup>3</sup> This section describes deacons as envisioned by our elders according to the recommended constitution and by-law changes presented to the congregation in August 2023.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Timothy 3:11 could either be describing the moral qualifications for deacons' wives or for women who serve in the office of deacon. The text itself is unclear. However, the preponderance of the evidence is in favor of an interpretation that Paul is providing for the moral qualification of women who serve the church in this office based on the use of the word "likewise" which is used to transition from elders to male deacons in verse 8 and in the absence of qualifications for the wives of elders in the preceding list of qualifications for that office. Additionally, Phoebe is referred to as a "deacon of the church at Cenchreae" by Paul in Romans 16:1.

<sup>5</sup> Acts 6:1–6 demonstrates why deacons are needed. Because at least two of the men selected in Acts 6 have public teaching ministries described in Acts 6–8, these men should not be thought of as deacons as we would know them today.

Ministry Directors are paid ministry team leaders.<sup>6</sup> The church employs men and women as ministry directors because of the time needed to fulfill their responsibilities. Ministry Directors may be part-time or full-time employees of the church. Like volunteer ministry team leaders, an elder supervises their work and provides pastoral direction for implementing our church's mission and vision within their assigned ministry area.

### **Administrative Positions**

A few positions within our congregation do not fall neatly into one of the above three categories. First, two administrative positions are filled annually by church vote at the annual members' meeting. These positions are church clerk and church treasurer. These two volunteer church members provide valuable accountability for the congregation in record-keeping and finances. The elders will only nominate candidates for these two positions who demonstrate the kind of Christian character and maturity expected of other church leaders.

Second, the church employs various administrative professionals who assist the elders, deacons, and ministry team leaders with secretarial, organizational, and communication needs. While these administrative professionals may be hired from outside of our congregation, the same Christian character criteria are expected of them as of our members who would serve as ministry team leaders.

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<sup>6</sup> The possibility exists that a ministry director could be paid a deacons. At the time of writing this paper, no paid deacons exist at NRBC, but this could be a possibility in the future.