

## MX Leadership Class – Confirming Teaching Plan and Next Steps

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Date: Monday, October 27, 2025 at 03:52 PM CDT

Andrew, Steve A., and Don,

Hey brothers — I wanted to check in and make sure we're all aligned on the plan for the upcoming *Church Leadership* class. The first session starts **November 9**, which is coming up quickly.

I know Steve A. has been out recently, so I'm not sure there's been much opportunity for him and Andrew to coordinate on the flow for *Week 1*. Also, for *Weeks 2 and 3*, we have Steve A. and Don scheduled to lead, but while we've outlined the topics, there's still room to finalize how you'd like to divide the material and structure your presentation.

Please take a look at the attached outline and reference material (links below) and let the group know if you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions. This series is shaping up to be an important one for our congregation — a great opportunity to teach clearly about biblical leadership and set the stage for potential changes within the eldership.

Thanks again for your time and mental energy as we prepare for this together.

---- Bret

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Document links here:

1. [3-Week Class Outline](#)
2. [Week 1 Instructor Reference](#)

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**From:** M Bret Blackford <bret\_blackford@yahoo.com>

**To:** MX MXElders <mxelders@mcknightcrossings.org>; Andrew Owens <aowens@mcknightcrossings.org>; Jeff McGlawn <jmcglawn@mcknightcrossings.org>

**Sent:** Tuesday, October 21, 2025 at 09:26:26 AM CDT

**Subject:** Eldership Class – Final Outline and Teaching Material

Brothers,

At our Elder Meeting last night, we discussed the upcoming **Church Leadership (Eldership) Class** at McKnight.

Attached are the supporting documents for review and teaching preparation:

1. [3-Week Class Outline](#) – High-level outline showing weekly focus, teachers, and flow of content

2. **Week 1 Instructor Reference** – Detailed background material for Andrew Owens and Steve Awtrey to draw from as they prepare the first class

## Purpose and Approach

This 3-week series is designed to provide both biblical and practical understanding of church leadership—what Scripture says about eldership, how McKnight applies those principles, and how the congregation can engage as we prepare future leaders.

To keep the class focused and accessible, we agreed on the following:

- **Teachers:** Steve Awtrey and Andrew Owens will teach Week 1; Steve Awtrey and Don Fitzgerald will teach Weeks 2 and 3.
- **Q&A:** Only questions submitted in advance will be addressed during class. We'll avoid open-mic sessions to ensure clarity and order.
- **Congregational Timing:** Some topics may introduce new perspectives, so we'll allow time for reflection before announcing next steps regarding potential elders.
- **Recording:** Classes will be recorded for internal use only (not for public posting).

## Class Schedule

Week 1	November 9 <i>The Forest: God's Design for His Church</i>	Andrew Owens & Steve Awtrey
Week 2	November 16 <i>The Trees: The Role of an Elder at McKnight</i>	Steve Awtrey &/or Don Fitzgerald
Week 3	November 23 <i>The Fruit: Becoming and Supporting Elders</i>	Steve Awtrey &/or Don Fitzgerald
Congregational Mtg.	December 7	all

The attached has been approved as final during our meeting last night so let's move forward with unity and confidence in both content and delivery.

If you have suggested refinements or concerns, share them soon so adjustments can be made before the first class on **November 9**.

---- Bret



Nov2025-EldershipClass\_3-weekOutline.docx  
25.6 KB



McKnight\_Eldership\_Class\_Week1\_InstructorReference.docx  
42.7 KB

**Format:** 3-week congregational class

**Timing:** Sundays after worship, late 2025

**Purpose:** To teach the biblical foundation of eldership and the practical, living model at McKnight as we invite and prepare new leaders.

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## **Week 1 – “The Forest: God’s Design for His Church”**

**NOTE:** This is not a script for the class but a broad detailed outline of topics covered. This material will be abbreviated for class but detail maintained to provide context and prepare for any Q&A.

Focus:

The big picture — God’s plan for the universal and local church and why leadership matters.

**Content:**

**Intro:** **Steve Awtrey**

### **1. What is the Church? (Andrew Owens)**

- Universal Church (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47)
- Local Church as God’s visible expression in each community

### **2. Why Leadership? (Andrew Owens)**

- Leadership is God’s design to equip and mature the body (Ephesians 4:11–16)
- Servant leadership vs. positional authority

### **3. Overview of Church Leadership Roles (Andrew Owens)**

- Elders (Shepherds, Overseers)
- Ministers (Evangelists, Teachers)
- Ministry Leaders / Connect-Group Leaders (“functional deacons”)

### **4. Eldership at McKnight: Guiding Principles (Steve Awtrey)**

- Shepherding Model 2025
- Locally adapted model
- Primary calling: Shepherd the flock (Ezekiel 34:4 reframed positively — strengthen, heal, bind up, bring back, search, serve in love)
- Three focus areas: Administration, Vision, and Pastoral Care. All Shepherds have a Pastoral responsibility, but some will also focus on Administration and Vision.

## 1. What Is the Church?

Throughout Scripture, God consistently works through structured leadership among His people. From patriarchs and judges to the elders of Israel and apostles of the early church, leadership was always meant to reflect God's order, wisdom, and care. The purpose of church leadership is not control, but stewardship — to guide, guard, and grow God's people (Ephesians 4:11–16).

The New Testament reveals two interrelated dimensions of the Church — the a.) Universal Church and the b.) Local Church.

### a. The Universal Church

Jesus first used the word 'church' (\*ekklesia\*, meaning 'assembly' or 'called out ones') in Matthew 16:18: "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." This refers to all believers across all time and nations who belong to Christ. Paul describes the Universal Church in Ephesians 1:22–23 as the 'body of Christ,' over which He is head. There is no human leadership over the Universal Church — only Christ Himself. This invisible church transcends geography, ethnicity, and time.

The Church is also called the 'Bride of Christ' (Ephesians 5:25–27; Revelation 19:7–8). At the resurrection, believers will meet Christ collectively as His Bride, emphasizing the communal nature of salvation.

### b. The Local Church

While the Universal Church is invisible and eternal, the Local Church is visible and contextual. It represents a specific gathering of believers in a particular place (e.g., 'the church in Corinth,' 'the churches of Galatia'). Local churches provide community, accountability, and leadership for spiritual growth (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). The Bible does not indicate that Christianity is a solo individual adventure, but a calling into a local body.

The early Christians met in homes, synagogues, and public places (Romans 16:5; Acts 2:46–47). They were united not by cultural background or social status, but by faith in Christ (Galatians 3:28). This unity across difference demonstrates that the Church is not a human organization but a spiritual family.

In Restoration Movement thought (including Churches of Christ), the local congregation is autonomous under Christ. Each local body seeks to restore the simplicity and purity of first-century Christianity by following Scripture as the sole authority.

At McKnight Crossings, we are one visible expression of Christ's universal body here in St. Louis — called to live in unity, love, and purpose.

## 2. Why Leadership?

Leadership in the church is not merely practical; it is theological. God has always appointed leaders to care for His people — Moses, the judges, kings, and elders of Israel. In the New Covenant, this pattern continues with shepherds (elders), evangelists, and deacons (servants).

Leadership fulfills two major purposes:

- **Order and Unity** — Paul emphasizes in 1 Corinthians 14:40, 'Let all things be done decently and in order.' Leadership provides structure so that worship, teaching, and ministry can be carried out effectively.
- **Guarding Truth and Maturity** — According to Ephesians 4:11–16, Christ gave leaders 'to equip the saints for the work of ministry' so that the body would not be 'tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.'

True leadership is defined by service, not status (Mark 10:42–45). Jesus redefined greatness as servanthood — a principle echoed in every biblical model of leadership.

Paul also reminds the church in 1 Thessalonians 5:12–13 to 'acknowledge those who labor among you, who care for you in the Lord and admonish you.' Leadership, therefore, is both a divine calling<sup>1</sup> and a mutual relationship between shepherds and the flock.

### Servant Leadership vs. Positional Authority

- Servant leadership focuses on humility, care, and equipping others.
- Positional authority focuses on control, recognition, and hierarchy.

Christ's model calls leaders to serve, not to rule. Leadership exists to mature and unify the body, not to elevate individuals.

<sup>1</sup> Although eldership is a divine calling, it differs from marriage — it is not a perpetual covenant but a serious responsibility entrusted to a qualified man for a season. An elder may serve faithfully for a time and later step aside without dishonor.

### 3. Overview of Church Leadership Roles

Scripture presents a clear yet flexible pattern of leadership within local congregations. Scripture gives only general guidance on the governance and structure of the local church and allows flexibility for each local church. Different roles within the church emphasize various aspects of Christ's work among His people.

#### A. Elders (Shepherds / Overseers)

Elders (and ministers) are the spiritual leaders within a local church. The New Testament uses three terms to describe this one office:

- Elder (\*presbyteros\*) — emphasizing maturity and wisdom (Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 5:1).
- Overseer (\*episkopos\*) — emphasizing management and care (1 Timothy 3:1–2; Titus 1:7).
- Shepherd / Pastor (\*poimēn\*) — emphasizing nurture and protection (1 Peter 5:2–4).

These three titles describe different facets of the same role. Elders are responsible for guarding doctrine (Titus 1:9), watching over the flock (Acts 20:28), and setting an example (1 Peter 5:3). They are appointed based on character and spiritual maturity rather than worldly accomplishment (1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9).

##### Key Responsibilities:

- Guard doctrine and unity (Acts 20:28–31; Titus 1:9)
  - Provide spiritual guidance and example (Hebrews 13:7; 1 Peter 5:3)
  - Pray for and watch over the flock (James 5:14)
  - Equip others for service (Ephesians 4:11–12)
- In the Church of Christ tradition, elders serve as a *plurality*—a group of shepherds sharing leadership and accountability as they model servant leadership under Christ, the Chief Shepherd (1 Peter 5:4).

Churches of Christ emphasize plurality — we feel it wise that a congregation should have multiple elders to ensure shared wisdom, accountability, and balanced leadership.

#### B. Ministers (Evangelists / Teachers)

Ministers, or evangelists, are also spiritual leaders within a church and serve as preachers and teachers of the Word. Their role is to proclaim the gospel, teach truth, and equip others for service (Ephesians 4:11–12; 2 Timothy 4:2,5). While they may serve in a 'located' or full-time capacity, their authority is rooted in the message, not in an office.

Paul instructed Timothy and Titus to teach sound doctrine, rebuke error, and encourage the faithful (Titus 2:1–8). Evangelists work alongside elders, not over them, helping the congregation grow in faith and understanding.

##### Key Responsibilities:

- Proclaim Christ publicly and privately (Acts 8:4–5; 20:20)
- Teach sound doctrine (Titus 2:1)
- Encourage spiritual growth and repentance (2 Timothy 2:24–26)
- Support the work of elders by equipping and encouraging the congregation (Ephesians 4:12)

While ministers often serve in visible teaching and communication roles, their calling is to **serve under Christ** and **alongside elders**, not above them—helping the body mature in faith and good works.

### C. Ministry Leaders / Functional Deacons

Deacons (\*diakonoi\*) were first appointed in Acts 6:1–4 to handle practical needs, allowing apostles to focus on prayer and teaching. Philippians 1:1 and 1 Timothy 3:8–13 show the continuation of this role in the early church.

In modern application, many churches have ministry leaders or connect-group leaders who function as 'servants' in various areas — benevolence, worship, children's ministry, etc. These roles allow the elders to focus on shepherding while ensuring all areas of ministry are active and cared for.

Servant leadership models Christ's humility: 'Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant' (Mark 10:43–45).

#### Key Responsibilities:

- Lead specific ministries (children, benevolence, worship, outreach, etc.)
- Support and implement the spiritual direction set by the elders
- Foster fellowship and care in small groups (Hebrews 10:24-25)
- Model servant leadership (Mark 10:43-45)

These roles represent the **hands and feet** of the congregation—those who turn vision into action and ensure that the church's ministries serve people well.

**Are These Roles Required or Optional?** Note: This is not expected to be part of the class but presented here as reference material only.

The New Testament provides both a required structure and flexible arrangements depending on a congregation's maturity and context.

- Elders** — Required as a church matures (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).

A local congregation *should* strive to have elders (plural) once it has qualified men. If none yet meet the qualifications, the church may function under the shared leadership of faithful men for a time — but the biblical goal remains appointing elders.

**Summary:** A local congregation *should* strive to have elders (plural) once it has qualified men (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). If none yet meet the qualifications, the church may function under the shared leadership of faithful men for a time — but the biblical goal remains appointing elders.
- Ministers** — Not mandatory, but the function of teaching and preaching must exist (Ephesians 4:11–12).

Evangelists and teachers were vital to spreading and maintaining the gospel. The early church was filled with those who taught and preached

**Summary:** Ministers / evangelists are highly valuable and biblically authorized, but not structurally required for a congregation to be considered a church of Christ.

The *function* (teaching and preaching) is required — the *office* or *title* is optional.
- Deacons / Ministry Leaders** — Optional but highly beneficial for practical service (Philippians 1:1; Acts 6:1–4).

The New Testament pattern authorizes the role of deacons (servants) to handle practical and administrative needs of the church. The word *deacon* simply means *servant* (*diakonos*), and Scripture gives flexibility in how service is organized. Not every congregation in the NT is explicitly said to have deacons. Likewise, modern roles such as *ministry leaders* or *connect-group leaders* are expedient arrangements — organizational tools that help elders and members fulfill biblical principles of service and fellowship (Acts 6:1-4; Hebrews 10:24-25).

**Summary:** Ministry leaders and deacons are biblically authorized but not mandated.

The function of service is required; the structure may vary by congregation.

Role	Required for a Biblical Church?	Scriptural Notes
<b>Elders (Shepherds / Overseers)</b>	<i>Yes — as soon as qualified men exist</i>	Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; 1 Tim 3:1-7
<b>Ministers / Evangelists / Teachers</b>	<i>No — but the work of teaching is essential</i>	Eph 4:11-12; 2 Tim 4:2; Acts 8:4-5
<b>Deacons / Ministry Leaders</b>	<i>Optional — authorized and beneficial</i>	Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8-13; Acts 6:1-4



The New Testament church is defined not by titles but by *functions*.

- Every church must have **leadership and teaching**.
- Every member is called to **serve**.
- As congregations mature, they appoint **elders and deacons** to organize that service in harmony with Scripture.

## 4. Eldership at McKnight: Guiding Principles

McKnight's Shepherding Model 2025 reflects our commitment to local, biblically grounded leadership focused on people over programs. Ezekiel 34:4 describes what failed shepherds neglected to do — strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the injured, bring back the strays, and search for the lost. Our shepherds aim to embody these actions in positive form: strengthen, heal, bind up, bring back, search, and serve in love. (Expand in class 2)

### Three Areas of Focus

- Pastoral Care — nurturing spiritual health through prayer, teaching, and presence.
- Administration — ensuring sound processes, communication, and stewardship of resources
- Vision — discerning and communicating God's direction for McKnight's mission and ministries.

All shepherds share pastoral responsibility, though individual elders may also focus on administration or vision based on gifting and need.

### Historical Context: The Restoration Vision

The Restoration Movement of the early 19th century (led by Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone) sought to return to the simplicity of New Testament Christianity. They emphasized congregational autonomy, biblical authority, and leadership modeled after the first-century church.

This means each local church governs itself under Christ, guided by elders chosen for their spiritual maturity. There is no central authority beyond Scripture, and unity is based on shared faith and love, not denominational structure.

This commitment to biblical eldership continues at McKnight, where shepherds are appointed not as administrators, but as spiritual caretakers of the flock (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2).

### Reflection & Discussion

1. How do we experience being shepherded within this body?
2. What qualities should we seek in additional shepherds?
3. How can every member share in the shepherding work of the church?

### Conclusion

Week 1 sets the stage for understanding God's structure for His Church. We have seen that the Church is both universal and local, that leadership is divinely ordained, and that elders, ministers, and servants work together for the unity and growth of the body. In Week 2, we will explore what it means to serve as an elder and how shepherding functions within McKnight's model of leadership.

Transition Verse: 1 Peter 5:1–4 — 'Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care... and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory.'

**Format:** 3-week congregational class with Congregational Meeting scheduled for Dec. 7

**Timing:** Sundays after worship, late 2025

**Purpose:** To teach the biblical foundation of eldership and the practical, living model at McKnight as we invite and prepare new leaders.

**Q&A:** To ensure clarity and order, only questions submitted in advance will be addressed. We will not hold an open-mic session for spontaneous questions from the audience.

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## WEEK 1 – “*The Forest: God’s Design for His Church*”

Class Date: November 9, 2025

### Focus:

The big picture — God’s plan for the universal and local church and why leadership matters.

### Content:

#### Intro to 3-Week Class: **Steve Awtrey**

##### 1. What is the Church? (**Andrew Owens**)

- *Universal Church* (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:47)
- *Local Church* as God’s visible expression in each community

##### 2. Why Leadership? (**Andrew Owens**)

- Leadership is God’s design to equip and mature the body (Ephesians 4:11-16)
- Servant leadership vs. positional authority

##### 3. Overview of Church Leadership Roles (**Andrew Owens**)

- Elders (Shepherds, Overseers)
- Ministers (Evangelists, Teachers)
- Ministry Leaders / Connect-Group Leaders (“functional deacons”)

##### 4. Eldership at McKnight: Guiding Principles (**Steve Awtrey**)

- [\*Shepherding Model 2025\*](#)
- Locally adapted model
- Primary calling: *Shepherd the flock* (Ezekiel 34:4 reframed positively — strengthen, heal, bind up, bring back, search, serve in love)
- Three focus areas: **Administration**, **Vision**, and **Pastoral Care**. All Shepherds have a **Pastoral** responsibility, but some will also focus on **Administration** and **Vision**.

## **WEEK 2 – “The Trees: The Role of an Elder at McKnight”**

Class Date: November 16, 2025

### **Focus:**

What elders *do*, how they lead, and how our 3-part model functions.

### **Content:**

**Taught by:** Steve Awtrey and/or Don Fitzgerald

#### **1. Core Calling: Shepherding**

- Strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind the injured, bring back strays, seek the lost
- Be examples, not overlords (1 Peter 5:1-4)

#### **2. Three Complementary Leadership Areas**

- **Pastoral Elders** – focus on relationships, prayer, visitation, and congregational care
- **Administrative Elders** – oversee finances, policies, facilities, risk management
- **Vision Elders** – cast vision, oversee ministers, and guide teaching priorities

Each team brings recommendations to the full eldership for final decisions.

#### **3. How Elders Work with Ministers**

- Elders = shepherds who lead spiritually
- Ministers = staff who equip and communicate (co-lead with elders)
- Mutual respect: “It is the job of ministers to set up elders for fruitful shepherding, and the job of elders to support ministers.”

#### **4. Shepherding in Practice**

- Monthly elder meetings focused on prayer and pastoral concerns
- Elders available Sunday 8:45 a.m. for prayer or discussion
- Special sessions on key issues (women’s roles, leadership, unity)

#### **5. Interactive Element**

- Current elders briefly describe their area (Admin / Vision / Pastoral) and a story from their experience.

## **WEEK 3 – “The Fruit: Becoming and Supporting Elders”**

Class Date: November 23, 2025

### **Focus:**

How men are called, trained, and affirmed — and how the congregation participates.

### **Content:**

**Taught by: Steve Awtrey and/or Don Fitzgerald**

#### **1. Biblical Qualifications<sup>1</sup>**

- 1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9
- Emphasize character and spiritual maturity over business skill

#### **2. Eldership Development at McKnight**

- Formal mentoring: men “intern and discern” alongside current elders
- Intentional leadership development — discipling future elders
- Rotational model: elders take sabbatical breaks; new elders are groomed and affirmed

#### **3. Congregational Partnership**

- Pray for and encourage elders (Hebrews 13:17)
- Provide feedback with grace
- Support ministry leaders (male and female) serving as “functional deacons”

#### **4. Looking Ahead**

- Explain process for adding younger married men to leadership
- Outline timeline for congregational input and prayer
- Conclude with commitment prayer for current and future elders.

<sup>1</sup> Teaching will include *1 Timothy 3:2* and *Titus 1:6*, where “the husband of one wife” is understood by McKnight to mean a man faithful to his wife and committed to a strong, godly marriage. As many in the congregation may need time to digest this view it may be wise to have some time between this class and the announcement that the Elders would like to have a divorced man consider interning as a potential future elder.