

Lakeview By-laws Questions

What prompted the rewriting of Lakeview's By-laws?

The merger talks with Grace and the deacons' and pastors' study of biblical eldership.

Back in 2013, the church leaders decided that it was in the church's best interest to leave the Missionary Church denomination. The church membership voted to leave the denomination which meant a new constitution had to be drafted. The leaders worked together to rewrite the document, concentrating most of their effort on the Statement of Faith portion. Some changes were made to the By-laws to remove the mention of the denomination but very few other changes were made. The thinking was that the Statement of Faith was of utmost importance and the By-laws could be adjusted later. After the Statement of Faith was finished, it was acknowledged that the new statement was in conflict in a few areas with the current By-laws and, therefore, the By-laws would have to be amended. With this in mind, the congregation proceeded to vote and approve the new constitution in April of 2014.

Fast forward to 2018. The leaders of Lakeview and the leaders of Grace Missionary Church entered discussions around the feasibility of merging the two churches together. As we began comparing our church constitutions the leaders from Grace pointed out the contradictions between the Statement of Faith and the By-laws in the Lakeview Constitution. When the merger talks concluded in July 2018, the leaders of Lakeview, being reminded of the work that needed to be done on the constitution, began to study Scripture along with the book *Biblical Eldership* by Alexander Strauch. The work of rewriting the By-laws began in September of 2018.

The new revision of the By-laws, then, is the completion of the work which began back in 2013.

How does the current Lakeview By-laws conflict with the Statement of Faith?

It conflicts in the areas of who elders and deacons are, their function and the general government of the church.

The Statement of Faith says, *"We teach the literal, grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture, which constitutes the only infallible rule of faith and practice."* Since Scripture is the only infallible rule for practice then our practices need to align with Scripture. The question is: Do our church practices reflect the teachings of Scripture?

The statement also says, *"We teach that the one supreme authority for the church is Christ and that church leadership... [is] appointed through His sovereignty as found in the Scriptures. The biblically designated officers serving under Christ and over the assembly are elders (also called bishops, pastors, and pastor-teachers) and deacons, both of whom must meet biblical qualifications. We teach that these leaders lead or rule as servants of Christ and have His authority in directing the church. The congregation is to submit to their leadership. "*

In the current By-laws, there are multiple officers that are mentioned: senior minister, associate minister, secretary, treasurer, financial secretary, deacons, deacon chairperson, deacon secretary, trustees, trustee chairperson, trustee secretary, Christian Education director, chairperson of missions

committee, member-at-large, executive board chairperson and elder. Whether or not the members of the nominating committee or the financial committee are officers of the church according to the By-laws is debatable. However, as you can clearly see, we have more than just elders and deacons as our Statement of Faith says. While the office of elder and deacon are based in Scripture as our Statement of Faith cites, the other offices are not mentioned.

Also, you can see a confusion in terms. In the current By-laws, an elder, senior minister or pastor (the By-laws use pastor and minister interchangeably) and the associate minister or pastor all hold different offices while our Statement of Faith says that they are one in the same office.

There is also a confusion in leadership. The Statement of Faith says that the church is to submit to the leadership of the elders and deacons. The By-laws, on the other hand, state that the leadership of the church and requisite submission belong to all of the other offices named above as well. There is an obvious conflict here, but the conflict becomes even more apparent as we continue on.

The Statement of Faith says, *"We teach that it is scriptural for true churches to cooperate with each other for the presentation and propagation of the faith. Each local church, however, through its elders and their interpretation and application of Scripture, should be the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation. The elders should determine all other matters of membership, policy, discipline, benevolence, and government as well."* According to this the elders by their interpretation and application of Scripture are to determine the cooperation of the church with other churches, membership, policy, discipline, benevolence, and government.

If you compare what is said to be taught in the Statement of Faith with what is practiced in the By-laws you will find some glaring problems. For example, under the current By-laws, we have one elder. That means, according to what is taught in the Statement of Faith, the one elder determines all matters of membership, policy, discipline, benevolence, government and church cooperation. Of course, this is not how Lakeview currently operates.

Another example of a problem is found in the function and choosing of elders. The By-laws say the deacons recommend the elder candidate to the Executive Board who then decides whether or not to approve him. If the executive board approves then 70% of the membership has to approve. If the deacons put forth another candidate for elder, does the current elder determine this matter of government as the Statement of Faith says he should? No, he only becomes one vote of the 70% approval or the 30% disapproval. Far from determining anything, the elder's leadership is subject first to the deacons, second to the Executive Board and third to the rest of the membership. Instead of submitting to the elder, as the Statement of Faith states, the congregation can choose to oppose him and approve another elder despite his disapproval. The office of elder, according to the By-laws, is a mere honorary title not a leader of the church.

A similar issue arises in reference to the senior and associate pastor. According to the Statement of Faith and Scripture, the senior and associate pastor hold the same biblical office of elder. The senior pastor and associate pastor, along with the elders, should also be the sole determiners of church cooperation, membership, policy, discipline, benevolence and government. Looking at the By-laws, it is clear that they do not. The senior pastor is called by a 70% vote of the congregation. Again, any current man in the role of elder or associate pastor has no more leadership in choosing the next senior pastor as any other member. A vote of confidence may be called for on the senior pastor by the Executive Board

and voted on by the membership. This clearly shows that the senior pastor is subject to the Executive Board and the membership. He is, therefore, not a leader and does not have the submission of the membership since at any time they can call a vote of confidence and excuse him from his office. The associate pastor, far from being equal with the senior pastor and elder, is called and dismissed at the mercy of the Executive Board alone. The membership, deacons, or any other member except those of the Executive Board have a say.

As you progress through the By-laws you find that the authority and leadership granted to the elders in Scripture and our Statement of Faith has been granted to the Executive Board and, ultimately, to the membership at large. The Executive Board is given the power to call meetings of the church, call associate pastors and dismiss them, review the pastors salaries, call a vote of confidence against the senior pastor, oversee the finances of the church, propose a budget, appoint deacons as they desire ratified by the membership, appoint trustees as they desire ratified by the membership, oversee the business of the church, oversee the ministries of the church, to make recommendations to the church as may affect its general welfare, formulate policies, approve procedures, give oversight to all elected and appointed officers, approve the calling of elders that is ratified by the membership, appoint anyone to a vacant elective office until the next annual election, appoint the finance committee, rule over any committee or ministry (such as men's ministry or children's ministry), give approval of the forming of new committees or ministries, and in the event of dissolution the Executive Board recommends and the membership ratifies where the money from the church goes.

As you can see, the Statement of Faith states the elders are the leaders of the church, have the authority to govern the church, and the membership is to honor them with their submission. In the By-laws, the Executive Board is given the authority to lead and govern the church and receives the church's submission except on a few special occasions when the membership votes and is not required to submit to anyone.

From just these few examples, there are obvious conflicts between the Statement of Faith and the By-laws and therefore a rewrite of the Lakeview constitution must be done.

Lakeview has been functioning fine under the current Statement of Faith and By-laws for almost five years. Do we really need to change it?

Yes, it's confusing and we want to make sure we do what we say we teach.

It is true that despite the contradictions the church has continued to function. However, this question is not a question of pragmatism (what works) but of integrity. We want to practice what we say we teach. If Scripture really is our rule of faith and practice, then the Statement of Faith and the By-laws should complement not oppose each other.

Where did the language for the new By-laws come from?

It came from the Bible, our current By-laws, and from other church By-laws.

The wording of the new By-laws is a fusion of a variety of different sources. The work began with researching all the examples, commands and principles of Scripture regarding church government. With this foundation in place, the current By-laws were compared with the Statement of Faith and Scripture. Areas of conflict between them were flagged for rewriting or removal. The next step was to consult

church history and to examine several different By-laws from long-established churches that currently operate under a biblical elder lead government. Following all this research, the work of writing began. The work took about 6 months and at least 15 different revisions. The deacons, elder and pastors reviewed the final draft, voted on and unanimously approved the new By-laws.

Is this a “power grab”? What prevents the elders from being power hungry?

No, it’s not a power grab but an effort to be more biblical. What keeps an elder from being power hungry is the same for all of God’s people: the work of the Holy Spirit, their own personal striving for holiness, and the obedience of God of the other church members in the areas of accountability, love, and submission.

The desire to move away from an Executive Board and membership voting model to an eldership model of church government is rooted in the desire to follow what is set forth in Scripture regarding the government of the church. As we study Scripture, we find that membership voting, and an Executive Board, are not mentioned there. However, elders and deacons are explicitly mentioned in Scripture. In 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul commands his fellow workers to find and appoint elders and deacons to lead the churches. The desire of the Lakeview leadership is to use the biblical terms and qualifications to prevent confusion, error and to give honor to God’s word as our only rule for faith and practice.

Could an elder become power hungry in the elder lead model? Of course, because the elders are human and the temptation of using power and authority for corrupt gain is one scheme of the devil. We believe that is why God said to have multiple elders leading the local church. One man is an easy target for pride and power, but multiple men of equal status help prevent that from happening. If an elder begins to stray in practice or doctrine the other elders have the responsibility to rebuke and correct. Another way that corruption of power should be prevented is when the members of the church invest their lives and prayers into the elders. A commitment to submission on the part of the membership and ever-growing love for God’s people on the part of elders is vital. The Bible calls us to trust Jesus to lead his church. The Holy Spirit is active in his church and will set up leaders and remove them if necessary. Our call as members of his church is to be obedient to the leading and power of Jesus over his church.

The same question can be asked of our current system of multiple church offices and member voting. Does our current government allow members to grab power?

Again, the answer is, yes because we are all sinners. The answer to this question is not just hypothetical though, because we have seen over the years examples of those who have grabbed power and authority in the church to their and the church’s detriment. The idea that a church member has the same amount of authority and power when it comes to voting as the pastors or elders do and the idea of a vote of confidence has led some individuals to not submit to the leadership or to openly rebel. They seized power, though biblically, they were disqualified as being leaders.

No matter what form of church government we use the temptation to abuse power is there and that is why we all need to do our part as leaders or church members and fulfill the roles that God has given us.

Does this mean that the membership no longer votes?

In the proposed By-laws, there is nothing that requires the church membership to vote.

Why are the church members not required to vote on the election of new officers or the budget?

First, we see no evidence of church members voting in the Bible. Historically, membership voting didn't happen until after the time of the Reformation. The churches that included membership voting into their government did so out of pragmatism not due to biblical command or precedent. Many started voting as a reaction against the king being the leader of the church (which is not Scriptural either).

Second, our Statement of Faith states, *"Each local church, however, through its elders and their interpretation and application of Scripture, should be the sole judge of the measure and method of its cooperation. The elders should determine all other matters of membership, policy, discipline, benevolence, and government as well."* If the elders are to determine these things, then there is really no need for the church members to vote.

The new By-laws do not ban a church membership vote it just doesn't require voting. If the elders have an issue that they think will be beneficial for the church to vote on they can call a vote.

If I can't vote, what's the point of being a member of Lakeview?

Church membership should never be about voting but about submitting our lives to each other.

Hopefully, no one became a member of Lakeview just so they could vote or hold an office; that is a sad way to view membership. On the other hand, becoming a member of a local church is about submitting to one another for their good and God's glory. Membership is a public declaration of your willing submission to the church leaders and your desire for them to watch over your soul (Hebrews 13:17) and of the commitment of your life geographically, socially, financially, vocationally, ethically and spiritually to the other members. Biblical church membership is supposed to impact every day of our lives and every decision we make and is not just relegated to a vote once a year or for those that just want to lead something. Our hope is that church membership will become more precious and meaningful in all of our lives.

How do these changes impact the average church attendee at Lakeview?

Not much at first, but over time they should expect more involvement, more communication, and more training.

Initially, most people will not notice any changes. However, as we work through the process of putting the By-laws into action, we anticipate a few things.

First, more men will be involved in leadership. Outside of the elders, deacons will be called to oversee the physical and financial day-to-day operations of the church.

Second, we desire and anticipate a growing communication between members and between members and the leadership. The proposed By-laws require that the elders have regular membership meetings. These meetings will be a normal means by which information between leaders and members is exchanged. Reports from the deacons and those leading different programs of the church will be given along with the financial report. Questions and suggestions from the membership will be taken. Any special teachings or concerns that the elders have will be given to the membership. The current plan is

to hold these meetings quarterly and can be adjusted as needed. Outside of the meetings, the elders will be looking to engage in the lives of the members as they seek to shepherd the souls they have been entrusted with.

Third, the church will have to be intentional in training up the next generation of leadership. For the church to grow and thrive, the church will need young men that are biblically well-trained and are pursuing a holy lifestyle to replace the older generation of elders and deacons. The church as a whole will need to find these young men and invest their time, energy and resources to prepare these new deacons and elders.

How do the current offices change under the new By-laws?

The church will follow the biblical model of having two offices: elders and deacons.

The office of elder will no longer be an honorary title but will function according to what is found in Scripture. The proposed By-laws state the following: *“The elders are collectively responsible to oversee the following: ruling and shepherding, equipping, prayer/fasting, teaching/preaching, administering baptism and the Lord’s Supper, administering church discipline and restoration, prayer for the healing of the sick, delegating responsibilities to the deacons, hiring and dismissing church staff, defining the responsibilities of church staff, and delegating responsibilities to the staff of subordinate ministries. The elders will approve the annual budget.”*

The office of deacon under the current By-laws provides spiritual advisement to the senior pastor and the Executive Board and oversees membership. Under the new By-laws, the office of deacon will *“under the general oversight of the elders, deacons will establish and manage the financial, physical, social and benevolent functions of the church.”*

The Executive Board and its offices will be disbanded. The elders will be responsible for setting policies and making decisions that impact the church. The responsibility for leading Christian Education is also given to the elders. The office of secretary will be disbanded. The elders will choose among themselves to record the minutes of their meetings. The minutes of the membership meetings will be taken by a person appointed by the elders. The responsibilities of the treasurer will be given to a deacon. The missions committee could still exist, however, an elder would provide oversight. The member-at-large would be replaced by all the members themselves. At the regular membership meetings, each member will be able to provide input and to receive all the reports and information that would normally be shared at an Executive Board meeting.

The trustee board would be disbanded and would be replaced by a deacon(s) that would provide oversight of all the physical property of the church. The deacon(s) can employ volunteers or “trustees” to help with maintenance and to seek advice.

The individual offices of the senior minister and the associate minister would be subsumed by the elders.

The nominating committee would no longer be necessary and is replaced by the elders and the membership.

The finance committee could continue to exist under the direction of the deacon(s) in charge of the church finances and general oversight of the elders.

If I don't get to vote, do I have any say in the choosing of new leadership?

Instead of just voting for a name or someone you might know, the new By-laws encourages all members to be engaged in examining leadership candidates.

Though the new By-laws do not call for a vote from the membership for a new elder or deacon, the membership plays a critical role. The new By-laws state: *“Upon examination of the candidate and unanimous approval by the elders, the elders will provide a written letter of intent informing the members of the name and approval of the candidate. The members will be given three weeks to provide any scriptural objections as to why the candidate is biblically unqualified for the position. If the candidate receives the unanimous support of the church members, the elders will ordain the new elder to the ministry of eldership through the laying on of hands and prayer.”*

Instead of a vote, the elders must get unanimous approval of a new elder candidate from the membership. The membership would have three weeks to ensure that the man being considered is biblically qualified for the position. So instead of just rubber stamping a vote, the membership is encouraged to vet the man themselves and compare him with the qualifications set forth in Scripture. The same process is set up for the calling of new deacons.

What will the transition to the new By-laws look like?

The changes to the new By-laws will occur in stages as different responsibilities are shifted to different people.

Upon ratification of the new By-laws, the current pastors: Les Martin, and David Block, and elder John Swartz will begin to function as elders as defined by Scripture and the Lakeview Constitution. The current deacons: John Hough, Tom Hanson, Dan Litwiller and Brady Bush will be asked by the elders to enter the elder candidate process. The elders will vet the candidates and upon unanimous approval will recommend these men to the church. A formal letter will be sent to each member inviting them to vet the candidates and to share with the elders any scripturally-based reason why a candidate is not qualified for the office. If no valid objection is made, then the four candidates will become elders.

The By-laws require the presence of at least two deacons. The process of installing them will happen early on if not simultaneously with the elders. The deacon candidate process is similar to the elder candidate process.

The elders will meet with those that currently hold an office that does not carry over into the new By-laws and discuss with them how their ministry may or may not change. If a person's ministry will change, then plans will be made with the elders and that individual on how and when the changes take place. These changes will vary based on many different factors including but not limited to the ministry that is affected, the timing of when the elders and deacons are appointed, and how much a person's ministry is affected.