Transition/Assessment Team (TAT) Proposal

Phase 2 Report, August 2017

The elders from each congregation meet together regularly.

This helps the congregations help each other to make disciples.

Each congregation is led and shepherded by its own elders (including a language pastor).

Language-based shepherding helps to serve the Bible to people.

Having multiple elders helps reflect biblical patterns.

The congregations can have "unity without uniformity."

They can be united in their core beliefs and their vision, without being uniform in practice.

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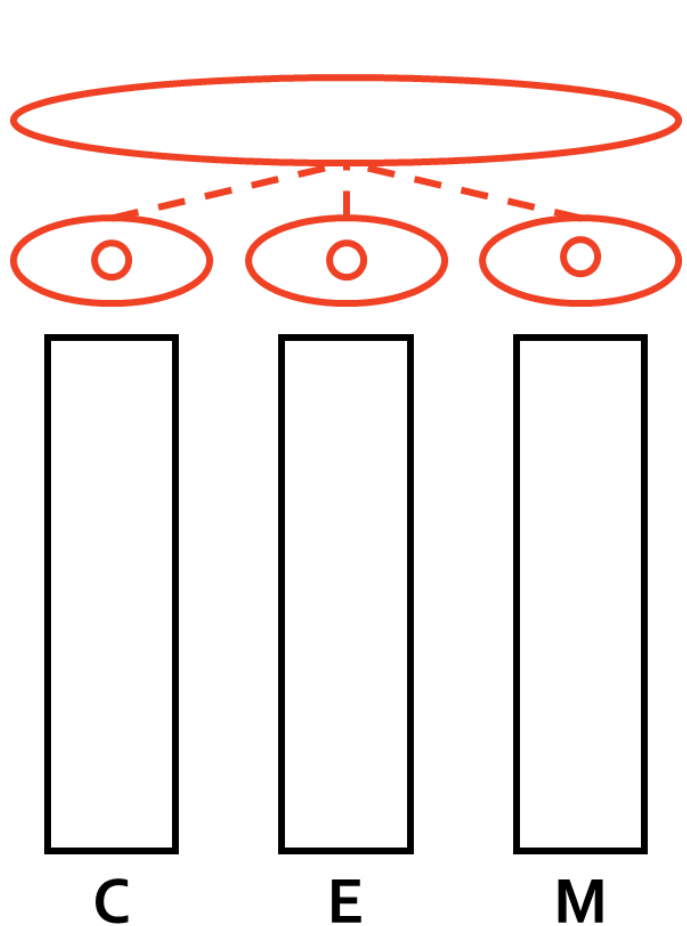
KEY

○	Language elder (pastor)
⬭	Elders from 1 congregation
⬯	Elders from 3 congregations
▯	Congregation

How does this compare with past models?[1]

Question	Pre-2011 Model	Post-2011 Model	TAT Model
Who teaches a congregation?	Language pastors	Functional pastors	Language pastors
Who leads a congregation?	A pastor + multiple deacons	A pastor + multiple deacons	Multiple elders
How much uniformity is required between congregations?	Some uniformity	More uniformity	Less uniformity
Do the three congregations partner together?	Yes	Yes	Yes

For further explanation, read the explanation on pages 3-7, and see the Phase 2 Report slides.

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[1] For clarity, some elements have been simplified.

For example:
- Functional pastors did not start immediately in 2011.
- On paper, the Executive Board is made up of elders, pastors, and deacons. But the specific composition has changed multiple times. For instance, at one time, the Executive Board contained lay elders. Currently, there are no lay elders, so practically, it is composed of only pastors and deacons.

Although this table strips some nuance, it can still be helpful in understanding the big picture.

TAT Proposal: Core Tenets

#1: Language-Based Shepherding

You can't effectively shepherd across languages.

Explanation

In the past, we wanted unity, so we brought "functional pastors" to try to shepherd across different languages.

This heart for unity is commendable. But trying to shepherd across languages unwittingly creates significant problems for paid elders (pastors):

- **Problem #1:** The church has to rely on "unicorns." That is, the church can generally only select from a small pool of multilingual pastors, and even then, they can struggle to communicate well to all groups. This is unfair to the church.
- **Problem #2:** The pastor has an unfair ratio of shepherd-to-sheep (roughly 1:600). So even if he's completely fluent in multiple languages and cultures, he still faces a superhuman task. This is unfair to the pastor.

Trying to shepherd across languages also causes problems for lay elders:

- **Problem #3:** It's difficult for a congregation to trust lay leaders (elders) they don't see. It's easier for a congregation to trust someone whose life and ministry they see. But it's unfair to ask a congregation to trust someone whom they don't see (because they don't speak their language and because they travel in different circles).
- **Problem #4:** It's difficult for lay leaders (elders) to care for people they don't see (because they don't speak their language and because they travel in different circles).

To receive the gospel, we must receive it in our own language (Romans 10:17, 1 Corinthians 14:11). Our language is not "of first importance," but it is necessary so we can hear the gospel that is "of first importance" (1 Corinthians 15:3). We should embrace this, not run from it.

Organizational unity is valuable. But effective shepherding is much more valuable, for the sake of the gospel.

Conclusion

Each congregation should have its own shepherds.

#2: Elders

Churches should be led by multiple elders.

Explanation

The Bible calls the leaders of the church "elders." These men teach the Bible (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7-9). They shepherd, exercise oversight, and provide an example to the flock (1 Peter 5:1-3).[2] And the Bible assumes that each church has *multiple* elders (e.g., Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5).[3] These are godly men (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9), so the congregation honors, trusts, and imitates them (1 Tim. 5:17; Heb. 13:7).

This has at least three implications:

1. The church should not be led by only *one* man; instead, it should be led by *multiple* men.

Otherwise, the church is limited by his wisdom, talent, and time, and more burden falls on him. There are also huge leadership gaps when he leaves.

2. The pastor is not the *boss* of all the other elders; instead, he might be the *first* among equals.

The Bible calls them all "elders." There are no "subordinate elders."[4]

The pastor might be more visible, since he preaches more. He might have more time to pray, read, shepherd, and strategize than the other elders, since he has been freed from secular employment. He might have more biblical training than the other elders. So the elders value his leadership. But ultimately, his vote is equal to any other elder's, and the other elders encourage him and keep him accountable as equals, not as subordinates.

3. The church shouldn't be led by a *deacon* board; instead, it should be led by an *elder* board.

Otherwise, deacons and members can misapply the Bible to the deacons, when the deacons are actually functioning like elders. The Bible envisions that the church's leaders will be shepherds, not just administrators.

God has blessed His people through many different structures. But it seems more biblical and healthier for each congregation to be led by multiple elders.

Conclusion

Each congregation should be led by multiple elders.

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[2] From this passage, you can see that the Bible uses the words "elder," "overseer," and "shepherd/pastor" to mean the same thing (see also Acts 20:17-18). But for clarity, we'll stick with the word "elder."

[3] Having said this, one man might be more visible. For example, Paul seems to assume that Timothy has a unique teaching role in his church (1 Tim. 1:3, 4:6, 4:11, 6:2).

[4] It could be possible that as church employees, one elder could be another elder's boss. But as elders, they would be equal in status.

#3: Unity without uniformity
We can have meaningful unity without having uniform practice.

Explanation

Forcing too much uniformity can actually hinder us from making disciples effectively.

For example, it would be unhelpful to force the Mandarin congregation to use the same worship music as the English congregation. It would be unhelpful to force the English congregation to perform the same outreaches as the Cantonese congregation. It would be unhelpful to force the Cantonese congregation to instruct its members the same way as the Mandarin congregation.

This wouldn't draw us together; it would tear us apart.

At the same time, we can be unified in two important areas:

1. Unity in Belief

We can be unified in our most important beliefs (our "die for" and "divide over" issues).[5]

This is significant unity—we can be united in the most important truth in the world: the gospel. We can be united in truths that that will outlive our frail bodies. We can be united in truths as sure as Christ's blood. We can be united in truths as strong as God's promise. We can be united in truths that separate us from the world—and even other Christians of good conscience (in "divide over" issues).

We can be united in these precious things. But at the same time, we can allow freedom in "debate" and "don't care" issues. Requiring uniformity here could be unnecessarily divisive.

Accordingly, we should revise our Doctrinal Statement to ensure that it reflects these "die for" and "divide over" issues, without requiring unity in "debate" or "don't care" issues.

2. Unity in Vision

We can be unified in the vision of making disciples in the Sacramento area and beyond.

Each congregation plays a significant part in this. Each congregation reaches a different language, and they even help each other reach those languages.

Conclusion

The congregations can have meaningful unity in belief and unity in vision, without requiring uniform practice:

- Unity in Belief: We should be united in "die for" and "divide over" issues but free in "debate" and "don't care" issues.
- Unity in Vision: We should be united in their vision of making disciples in the Sacramento area and beyond.

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[5] We can categorize all doctrines into four levels: first level ("die for"), second level ("divide over"), third level ("debate for"), and fourth level ("don't care"). For more information, see the slides. For similar classifications, see http://www.albertmohler.com/2004/05/20/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity-2/ and https://www.westernseminary.edu/stories/gospel-unity/.

#4: We need each other

The vision requires each congregation to work together.

Explanation

It's difficult for the three congregations to stay together. We get in each other's way. Making disciples in one language and one congregation is difficult already, but things get much more complicated when we have three languages and three congregations.

It's like having three families living in the same house. Raising a family in one house is difficult already, but when three families live in the same house, the fights get exponentially more complex.

Would it be better to completely separate? Some things would certainly be easier.

But this would hurt the overall vision of making disciples in the Sacramento area and beyond. Congregations would suffer. For example, if the English congregation hived off from the Cantonese and Mandarin congregations, then the Cantonese and Mandarin congregations would struggle to make disciples of their own children, and the English congregation would lose the opportunity to make disciples of these children. And if we want to make disciples of *all nations*, we need *each congregation* to thrive.

This *doesn't* mean that the three congregations need to be identical, or even that they must stay in the same building or use the same name. But it *does* mean that they must support each other.

It might be easier to walk away, without having to sacrifice for each other. But our Savior didn't just look out for His own interests; He sacrificed Himself for others. Maybe this is a way we can imitate Him (Philippians 2:1-11).

Conclusion

The best way for the three congregations to make disciples in the Sacramento area is to partner together.

One practical way to do this is for the elders of each congregation to meet together regularly to coordinate ministry.