

New Life Fellowship Elder's

Rule of Life

Our Guidelines for Being Together

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INTRODUCTION

We believe that our ministry as elders emerges out of a call from God. We are to separate from the world and enter into communion with God. It is from this place of being with Jesus that we lead others out of a heart of compassion and in the fulfillment of our mission as a local church. Like David, we want to shepherd God's people "with integrity of heart" and with "skillful hands" (Ps. 78:72).

We recognize that leadership brings out the best and worst in us. In many ways, the crucible of pastoral ministry, as well as serving as an elder, "introduces us to ourselves." We affirm, as Parker Palmer has written, "a leader is someone with the power to project either shadow or light onto some part of the world and onto the lives of the people who dwell there. A good leader is intensely aware of the interplay of inner shadow and light, lest the act of leadership do more harm than good." (Let Your Life Speak, pp. 78-9).

In such a role, we commit ourselves to the following "rule" to keep us centered in the Lord Jesus and His call for our lives. Our purpose is, as Benedict wrote 1500 years ago, that our "way of acting should be different than the world's way; the love of Christ must come before all else" (Rule of Benedict 4:20-21).

OUR BEING (CHARACTER)

We are essentially called to seek Him above all else (Psalms 27:4), that is, to be contemplatives, out of which we "tent-make" and carry out our active ministry. We recognize God has called us to a level of intensity to bring Jesus Christ to our city and world through serving as elders at New Life Fellowship Church.

Freely, under His grace, we determine to model the qualities of leadership laid out by the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 3: “above reproach, self-controlled, respectable, able to teach, hospitable, gentle, not quarrelsome, free from the love of money, managing our families well.” (“If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?” 1 Timothy 3:6). Whether single or married, we minister out of our marital status; if married, our marriage covenant takes precedence over the work of New Life Fellowship.

We function, as defined by Presbyterian polity, as “ruling elders,” while our pastoral staff serves as “teaching elders”. As a result, we seek to model to the flock of God the kind of life Christ desires for his people to live. “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of God of which the Spirit has made you overseers” (Acts 20:28).

We consider the vocation as elders to be a high calling and a trust given by God. As Gregory of Nazianus taught around 370 AD: “The responsibility of pastoral office is great indeed, and no one ought to enter who has not deeply examined motive and ability, who has not struggled against call in the face of godly demands of office and the frailty of mere humanity.”

Our aim, as an elder board, along with our pastoral staff, is to be a vital organism with a contented spirit. While we live in a world surrounded by unceasing needs, we desire to serve God out of a “joyful, non-anxious spirit” in a way that is peaceful and harmonious with others – not agitated, hectic or confused. We do not claim to be perfect, by any means; we acknowledge difficult times in living out our “rule of life”, but our commitment is to honesty and openness, asking for help when needed and living in brokenness and contriteness of heart (Psalms 51:17).

At the same time we want to understand who we are and who we are not, our limits and our potentials. We lead out of the unique material God has given us. We desire to function in roles within the board that are congruent with our authentic selves and families.

As shepherds, leaders, and servants of this particular flock, we must regularly ask ourselves: Which of my limits are part of my God-given nature that I need to receive as a gift? Are there limits before me that God is asking me to break through because they come out of character flaws or my “false self”?

These limits and potentials are one of the means God uses to speak to us and to reveal the particular role we are able to take in service to Him at New Life Fellowship. This discernment from the Holy Spirit comes, we believe, from wise counsel, self-confrontation, and those in authority over us.

OUR DOING (ACTIVITY)

We have at least four roles in the community of New Life Fellowship: we are family members, spiritual leaders, employers and fellow members in the community. These roles carry challenges in how we relate to one another and to New Life Fellowship.

Each person called and invited to be on staff at New Life Fellowship is valued as a gift from God. We long to see all staff members growing and thriving in their respective roles.

The elder board is responsible for the wise stewardship of the church's resources in our dynamic, changing environment. We must both value our staff while at the same time do what is best for the larger body long term. This is a difficult line to walk. We ensure that each staff member receives periodic reviews regarding their job description, status and contract.

SPECIFIC RULE OF LIFE

The following "Rule of Life" expresses our conscious guidelines to keep God at the center of everything we do – to seek the "love of Christ" above all else. In a culture that does not respect God's rhythms for life; we seek to live out a balance of prayer, rest, work, and community.

This "Rule" provides guidelines for the kind of leadership we aim to embody, as well as a foundation for the relational culture we want to build and function within.

Prayer

- Scripture – Our lives are built on the Word of God. It is our food and primary means of revelation from Him. We spend time each day in Scripture, seeking God's face, dwelling in His presence and praying out of His Word.
- Silence and Solitude – We seek to build silence and solitude into our daily routines.
- Daily Office – Nothing is to be preferred to the work of God (Rule of St. Benedict). We pause to be with God two to three times a day to remember Him, spending time in communion with Him, preferably with Scripture, silence, meditation and prayer – even if this is only for a few minutes.

- Study – We are consistently growing and taking steps to keep learning about Jesus, as well as our unique values (emotional health, contemplative spirituality, and reconciliation) and our particular area of calling in Christ.

Rest

- Sabbath – Each week, we set aside a 24 hour period to keep Sabbath to the Lord, structuring our time around the following four characteristics of biblical Sabbaths – Stop, Rest, Delight and Contemplate. We trust God to build His church while we respect Sabbath-keeping as an essential formation discipline in our lives.
- Simplicity – We model percentage giving (using the tithe as a minimal guideline) in giving to God’s work here at New Life Fellowship. We manage our material resources in a manner that honors God and avoids the traps and enticements of Western culture (e.g. bad debt, gambling, etc.) as we live out the basic principles of our Good Sense Course (i.e. planning, giving, saving, budgeting, and balancing a spending plan).
- Play and Recreation – We have a life outside of New Life Fellowship for balance and health. We recognize the seasons and rhythms of leadership and the church year and plan compensatory breaks accordingly. We build healthy “fun” into our discipleship and take vacations each year to allow the soil of our lives to be replenished and receive fresh “nutrients” from God as we take mini-Sabbaticals along the four principles of Stopping, Resting, Delighting and Contemplating.

Work

- Service and Mission - Our primary means to serve Christ in New Life Fellowship is through our elder board. We will each focus on at least one specific area of ministry in New Life (hopefully out of our gift mix and passions). In this way, “the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work” (Ephesians 4:16).
- Care for the Physical Body – We understand the stewardship of our physical bodies is also part of our discipleship and modeling. We seek to regularly care for our physical temples through healthy eating habits, consistent exercise, and sufficient amounts of sleep, respecting our God-given limits.

Relationships

- Emotional Health – We are committed to a spiritual formation model that embraces our whole person, including the emotional component of who we are as image bearers of God. We embrace the skills and behaviors that put feet on our theology to love well (1 Corinthians 13). In all our relationships we seek to speak clearly, directly, respectfully and honestly. We aim to incarnate like Christ and listen well. We avoid making assumptions without verification. We fight fairly and clarify expectations in all our relationships. And like Christ, we seek to be present with others, and ourselves especially in the presence of anxiety, whether it be our own or that of others.
- Family – We believe in the equal value of God’s call to both singleness and marriage. We affirm with Scripture the gift of singleness for leadership (1 Corinthians 7:25-40). Both Jesus and Paul were single. At the same time, we understand the limits and great potentials of the marriage covenant for our work and our personal choices. We desire high-quality marriages, out of which we are able to minister to others. If we are married, our spouses make their own choices and have their own needs and desires apart from us. We affirm this. Our expectation is for honesty and transparency regarding our marriages and family life with those whom God has placed in authority over us.

Community

- Companions for Your Journey – Our roles as family members and the elders of our church family carry with them a unique challenge. This complex relationship requires grace, maturity, wisdom and discernment. We seek to be in relationships with mature people outside New Life Fellowship when possible; these relationships might be with a spiritual director, a mentor, a counselor or a mature friend, depending on person’s unique needs and season in God.

My prayer and exhortation for the leadership of New Life Fellowship is that of St. Benedict as he introduced his Rule: “Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love (RB, Prologue, 49).