

Riverview Church Planter Evaluation Process

The local church, as described in the New Testament, was always led by a team of elders (also known as pastors, overseers, or shepherds). Riverview functions in the same way, with a team of pastors who work together to lead the church. New church plants from Riverview are either led by a team of elders or are assigned elders from Riverview until such time that local elders can be recognized.

This structure provides accountability, protection, shared burden, and shared teaching responsibilities, among other things. As the wisest man who ever lived once wrote:

"Two people can accomplish more than twice as much as one; they get a better return for their labor. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But people who are alone when they fall are in real trouble. A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken." (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10,12)

This leadership structure necessitates a lengthy and comprehensive evaluation of all potential elders. It can be difficult (and sometimes frustrating) to go through a process like this, but it is more difficult and frustrating for the church if elders are recognized before they have been thoroughly evaluated. Church planting is a difficult endeavor and often fails because of a lack of assessment of the men who plant the church.

This process seeks to provide sufficient opportunity for men who aspire to be church planters to evaluate themselves and be evaluated by others around them. The goal of this process is to identify strengths and growth areas of an individual as well as confirm whether or not he will be able to plant a church through Riverview. This document is not intended to be used to validate any man's identity, produce pride, or inflict condemnation.

Phase 1: Establish an observable track record (1-3 years)

Men who wish to serve as church planters should have a known track record of serving, leading and giving within Riverview, with demonstrated teaching skills and observable fruit in ministry, marriage and family life. This is in keeping with the instruction of 1 Peter 5:3 that elders should be "examples to the flock."

It is recommended that during this phase, the man desiring to become a church planter begins reading the books and articles listed in the attached document. Many of these will be discussed in future training times and conferences.

Phase 2: Self-Nomination

When a Riverview member desires to plant a church, he should make his desire known to one of the current elders (preferably an elder he has served with). That elder will discuss and confirm the next steps for the individual and give further direction. This is in keeping with the instruction of 1 Timothy 3 that men who aspire to the office of elder should "be tested first" (3:10). If the elder thinks the man is ready for the next phase, he will bring a recommendation to the A-Team. If deemed necessary, the A-Team will conduct a face to face interview with the candidate. If they are unanimous in their approval of the candidate, he will be assigned an overseeing elder(s) and move onto Phase 3.

Phase 3: Qualification and Preparation (6 months - 5 years)

Scripture is clear that no man is to be appointed to the eldership unless he is qualified. A man may desire eldership, yet be years away from meeting the rigorous biblical qualifications. During this phase, specific attention will be given to the "chemistry" or "fit" of the elder candidate with the culture of the city he wants to plant in, as well as the team he desires to serve with. This phase, therefore, may be long and will require great patience and discipline on the part of potential elders.

If the candidate is married, he and his wife will be assigned a mentor couple who will discuss the rigors of eldership and church planting. Spousal support is an essential component of church planting and it is quite possible that a man may be qualified to plant a church but have family situations that prevent him from doing so. It is better to discover this during the candidate phase rather than 2 or 3 years into the church plant.

All aspiring elders should rigorously study 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 to understand God's expectations for pastor/elders. All Christians are in the process of sanctification, so qualifications must be read against the backdrop of God's grace (i.e. the standard is maturity, not perfection). But Scripture is clear that no man is qualified to lead Jesus' church unless he is:

- A mature Christian, not a new/young believer (1 Tim 3:6)
- An exemplary, godly leader in his marriage and family (1 Tim 3:4-5)
- Self-controlled and disciplined in his personal habits (1 Tim 3:2-3)
- An exemplary steward of his financial resources (1 Tim 3:3)
- A man of observable, proven godly character (Titus 1:8)
- Skilled in the study, teaching, and defense of God's Word (Titus 1:9)
- Able to recognize and combat all types of false teaching (Titus 1:9)
- Courageous enough to confront sin and error (Titus 1:10-13)

Men who aspire to eldership but are not yet qualified should submit to the current elders for assistance in their growth and development (Heb 13:17, 1 Peter 5:5). During this time period, potential elders should focus on developing their Character, Ministry Skills, and Doctrine. To this end, he will have specific goals in each area that are reviewed regularly by his overseeing elder(s). Some men may take longer to go through this phase than others. Each candidate's experience, knowledge, teachability, and many other factors (which can't be detailed in this document because they are so different for each individual) will determine how long it takes and whether he is able to continue onto the next phase.

During this Phase, the elder candidate will be expected to:

- Regularly attend Riverview Staff Meetings / Retreats / Prayer Times
- Regularly meet with his overseeing elder(s) (which may be on an individual or group basis)
- Serve in the leadership of a key ministry area or venue
- Teach as directed in a ministry area or class
- Attend training times as directed

In addition, the elder candidate must read any books that are assigned and be prepared to discuss them during training times.

Once the overseeing elder(s) believes the candidate is qualified to be recognized as an elder, he will be given the Elder Qualification Test which will be completed by the candidate, his wife (if applicable), the overseeing elder(s), and two people who have served under the candidate in ministry (to be selected by the overseeing elder).

After examining the tests, the A-Team will conduct a face to face interview with the candidate and his wife (if applicable). If they are unanimous in their approval of the candidate, he will move on to Phase 4.

Phase 4: Plant Preparation Phase (6 - 12 months)

Once a man has had his qualifications confirmed by the A-Team and his overseeing elder(s), he may enter a phase of study and preparation for his church plant. This phase involves intentional mentorship by the current elders and careful biblical/theological study regarding the roles, responsibilities, and functions of elders. Additionally, it requires a carefully thought through strategy for planting a church in a specific city.

Features of this phase include:

- Husband/Wife Interview
 - o Each candidate and his wife must meet with the A-Team for a candid interview related to issues of marriage and family
- Communal Scrutiny
 - o At the beginning of the examination phase, the members of Riverview will be urged to evaluate the lives and conduct of the potential elders. If a member is aware of any disqualifying sin or character flaw in an elder candidate, he or she will be urged to make the matter known to the A-Team in writing, who will investigate the claim.
- Written Exam – Bible Comprehension
- Written Exam – Practical and Pastoral Theology
- Written Essays
 - o Personal Spiritual History
 - o Spiritual Habits
 - o Theological Influences
 - o Leadership Strengths and Weaknesses
 - o Gospel Articulation
- Acts 29 church planter assessment
- Careful reading and study of Riverview’s governing documents, doctrinal statements, and philosophy of ministry and development of the same for the church plant
- Development of a budget for the church plant
- Fund raising for the church plant
- Development of a team for the church plant, including core members, staff, and families that will join

Riverview Church Planter Evaluation Process Agreement

I submit myself to the process as delineated in the *Riverview Church Planter Evaluation Process* document. I understand that a failure to meet any assigned deadlines or to attend required meetings could damage future possibilities for planting a church through Riverview. At any point in this process, I understand I may step out of consideration or be asked to step out (either for a specified time or indefinitely) by the current elders. I also understand that completing this process thoroughly and completely does not guarantee I will be approved to plant a church through Riverview. I submit to the above process and the final decision of the elders and, should I not be selected for this office, I will lovingly follow their lead and will not sew discord among Riverview members.

Elder Candidate's Printed Name

Signature

Date

Elder Candidate's Wife's Printed Name
(If Applicable)

Signature

Date

Current Elder's Printed Name

Signature

Date