

# **We See, We Affirm, We Commission:**

How Our Community Acknowledges and Invests in God's Calling in the life of a Pastor

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## **Our View of Ministry**

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In every church community there are people who lead. Sometimes these people have a formal titles and position and are even paid for their responsibility. In other cases the leaders are informal, having developed credibility and authority through relationships over the course of time. The Bible talks a great deal about the different leaders in the community, referring to elders, deacons, and various roles like pastor, teacher, evangelist, prophet and others. How this leadership emerges and is developed is an important question for every church community. Are leaders called and equipped by God? Are they appointed by other leaders in the church or by the general membership? What is the difference between leadership and ministry?

At Bridge City we hold that all followers of Jesus are called to be of great influence. We do this by serving. When the Bible talks about ministry, this is what it is referring to. In fact, it is one of the highest purposes of the church to help individual followers of Jesus learn how they can do ministry by serving out of their gifts, skills and life experiences.

While all followers of Jesus serve, it is also clear from scripture there are certain leaders who are called to a more global responsibility. Ephesians 4 identifies certain leaders in the church who have the calling of equipping the rest of the church for ministry and maturity. These leaders have a unique role and responsibility within the church - and this is the distinction between a pastor and a minister. All followers of Jesus are called to minister. Some might serve so well and be so gifted that they end up being asked to work part- or full-time in their area of ministry. But this is not the same as being called to be a pastor.

A pastor is a follower of Jesus with the responsibility to shepherd and lead a church community. The shepherding role is about care, discipleship, and equipping. The leadership role is about vision and motivation. This person has a deep internal sense that God has called them to this role; and that calling has been affirmed by a community of people who see the impact of this calling in their lives.

## **Our View of Ordination**

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Commonly pastors are ordained to ministry. This is some kind of official recognition of leadership and authority. In some churches and denominations this is the distinction between someone who is a "real" full-time pastor and someone who is a ministry volunteer, or some lesser ministry position. In other communities it is mainly a spiritual recognition of authority. More practically, ordination is the official recognition that a pastor needs in order to be recognized by the state to conduct marriages and to receive the tax benefits available to clergy.

Biblically the word ordination and its variants are used infrequently. When they are, they refer to someone or something being "set apart" by God and given a particular purpose. The priests in the Old Testament were ordained in this manner (i.e. Exodus 28:41). In the New Testament leaders in local congregations were appointed (i.e. Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5) and set apart for ministry through the laying on of hands and prayer (i.e. Acts 6:6, 13:3). It also seems clear that while people might be appointed to ministry leadership by a local church, it is truly God who sets people apart with the calling to pastoral ministry (i.e. 1st Corinthians 12:28).

At Bridge City it has been our position that God alone ordains people. He is the one who sets people apart for the purpose of spiritual leadership and gives them the gifts necessary to fulfill that responsibility. As a church community it is our role to acknowledge when we see this happen in someone's life.

## **Affirmation & Commission**

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Because we believe that God alone ordains, Bridge City does not ordain its pastors. We consider it our responsibility to equip all followers of Jesus for ministry and leadership. From time to time it will become apparent that someone in particular has a calling on their life to spiritual leadership. We believe these people are already ordained by God, and we will encourage them to organize their lives around that calling. It will also be the case that some of these people will be called by God to pastoral leadership in our community as full- or part-time paid pastors. We believe that this will be made apparent by God's work in their lives, as well as through His work and leading in the community.

Sometimes this is fairly obvious. Other times a person may have a desire to serve more, but are uncertain about whether this is a divine calling to be a pastor, or a developing passion for a certain area of ministry. As a church family, we take seriously the responsibility to help people explore their sense of calling. We do this through mentoring and providing opportunities to serve. When it becomes apparent that someone is called to be a pastor at Bridge City Community Church, we will recognize that ordination through a process we call Affirmation & Commission. We call it this to focus attention on our role as a community.

First, we affirm that we have observed God's ordination in the life of a leader, and we encourage them to organize their life around it so that they can answer that call and continue to be equipped for their ministry.

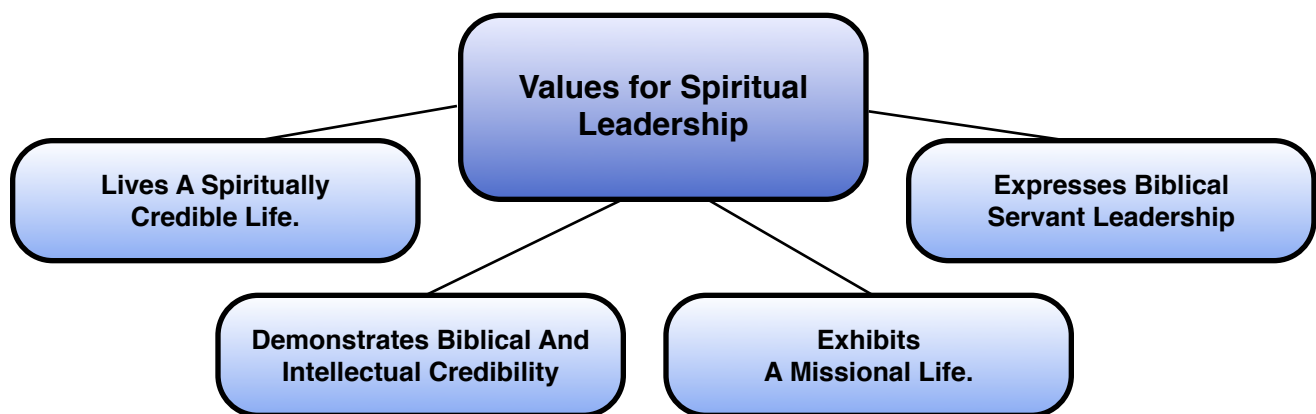
Second, we commission them to a role of spiritual leadership and authority within our community. More accurately we recognize that God has commissioned them to this. We agree that God is leading through them, and we submit ourselves to their leadership.

## Values for Spiritual Leadership

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We believe that part of the process of seeing God's ordination unfold in a leader's life is found in the choices they make in their own life and how their leadership impacts the community. To this end we have laid out four values for spiritual leadership that we believe will be evident in the life of anyone God is calling to pastoral ministry. These values summarize what we believe scripture says about the life and calling of leaders in the church. To be sure, these values largely express God's expectations for all followers of Jesus - but someone called to leadership will exhibit a deep care for these things and an intention to grow in these areas.

In addition to defining what we believe leaders at Bridge City will pursue, this set of values and their explanation will also serve to focus the equipping journey for leaders in the mentoring process.



### Lives A Spiritually Credible Life.

- Above reproach and has a good reputation both inside and outside the church.
- Has a personal spiritual journey that is current, active, and meaningful and is willing to share their experiences with others.
- Regardless of temperament or personal style, has shown relational skills that lead to reconciliation - able to forgive, not argumentative, kind, etc.
- Has shown a character that is self-controlled, gracious and teachable.
- Is hard-working, self-motivated, and committed to growing in excellence.

### **Expresses Biblical Servant Leadership.**

- Leads from a spiritual center where prayer, Biblical meditation and worship are a core part of establishing their leadership vision and practice.
- Understands their primary leadership responsibility as equipping others to do ministry, and is actively mentoring others in leadership and spiritual discipleship.
- Is committed to a relational view of ministry, building teams to do ministry and acting as a mentor and coach. Able to lead both as an individual and as a member of a team.
- Their leadership is tempered by love, both for the mission of the church as well as for the individuals they serve.
- Able to offer spiritual guidance, and has shown the ability to say hard things for the good of the listener in ways that are experienced as loving.
- Able to teach in a variety of settings and cast a compelling and motivating vision of action. Is committed to growing in their ability to teach and communicate.

### **Exhibits A Missional Life.**

- Committed to sharing Jesus with others and living out the Great Commission.
- A Family Member of Bridge City Community Church who has demonstrated an understanding of and commitment to the mission, core values and ministry strategy of the church, and is an active member of the Bridge City cell process
- Has shown a missional vision of the church as an agent for change and transformation, rather than just a safe sub-culture for Christians.
- Has shown a personal sense of calling to ministry, has begun orienting their lives around that calling, and has had that calling affirmed by others around them.
- Understands how they are best wired to serve, and are organizing their life so that they can serve in ways that align with this. This includes an understanding of their temperament, personal style and spiritual giftedness.

### **Demonstrates Biblical And Intellectual Credibility.**

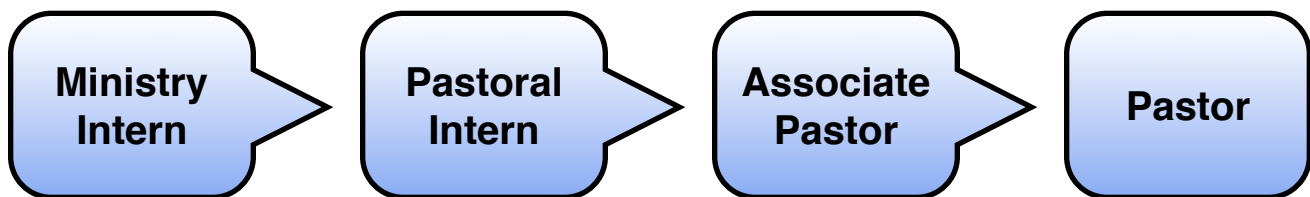
- Growing in Biblical literacy, including a large-scale understanding of the narrative of scripture, with an awareness of the implications of the original languages and Biblical cultures, and familiar with the breadth of theological perspectives. Able to personally study and interpret scripture.
- Growing in education and experience. The church's preference leans toward academic preparation, and encourages all pastors to continue appropriate education, at least through a Masters Degree. At the same time, real-life ministry experience is important to apply and temper academic training, and candidates will show a depth and breadth of experience appropriate for their ministry role.
- Open to theological conversation. Bridge City has committed to keeping space open for theological discussion, and any pastor in this community will share that value, able to confidently express their understanding of scripture while remaining open to fresh understanding.

## The Path to Affirmation & Commission

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Because we believe that it is our responsibility as a church to equip all followers of Jesus for ministry and leadership, any discussion of the path to Affirmation & Commission must begin with the most basic level of developing leadership. Over time and through experience, leaders will mature and develop. We want to be intentional in providing opportunities and mentoring as they grow.. This mentoring process serves two purposes. First, it allows the person to explore their own sense of calling. What is their area of passion? How are they gifted? Are they called to serve in ministry as a vocation? Is this a pastoral calling? Second, this process allows the community to encourage, equip and evaluate the person. While God ordains people to ministry, He affirms that calling through a community that sees and acknowledges that ordination. Does the community see this person as a leader? Why or why not?

This process of exploration and evaluation continues throughout four seasons of leadership growth that we have identified.

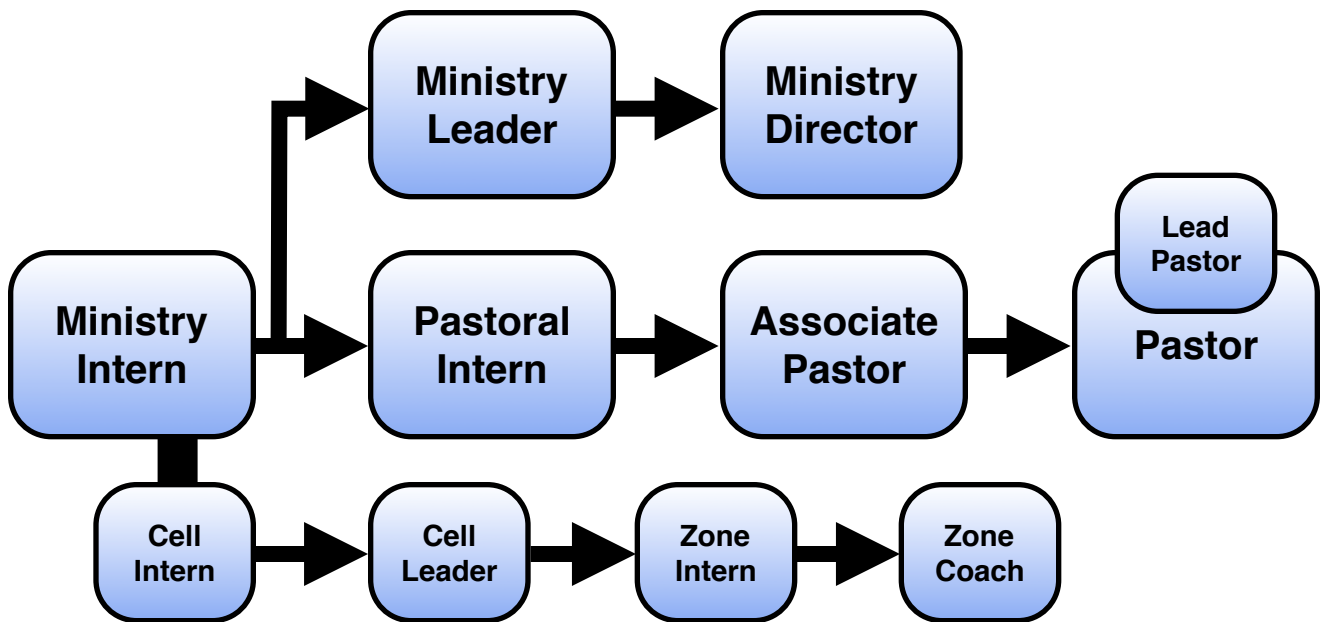


A person will begin by exhibiting interest, passion or leadership gifts in the community, in their ministry volunteer roles, or in their personal pursuit of blessing and serving. A leader within the church will notice this and will begin investing in that person. This is the beginning for leadership anywhere - within a cell, within a ministry area. At some point this mentoring relationship can become more official and the new leader is a Ministry Intern.

Many people will grow into leadership via mentoring relationships, but not all of them have a desire or calling to pastoral ministry. But some will show a glimpse of this, perhaps an interest, or a more global vision of the church than most. It may come about as a leading of the Holy Spirit in the heart of their mentor. When it seems likely that a person is developing in this direction, they can become a Pastoral Intern, working more closely with a pastoral mentor who is specifically looking to help them explore and develop their ministry calling.

When it becomes clear that a leader is called to pastoral ministry, and they have shown themselves to be open and teachable, they are ready for more intentional mentoring. By this time many people within the community affirm their ministry calling, and the church enters into an official process of equipping that person for vocational ministry. At this point the person becomes a pastor-in-training, called an Associate Pastor, working on a clear process with the Lead Pastor or a mentoring pastor towards the Affirmation & Commission process. Once they have moved through this process, the church affirms their ordination and commissions them to their responsibility within the community. At this point they are officially a Pastor.

There are a variety of different kinds of leadership within the church. As we said, all followers of Jesus are called to ministry, but not all are called to pastor. So these four seasons of leadership development split into a variety of tracks. Here's an example:



Some people may grow in their leadership skills and sense of calling to ministry, but not have a desire or calling to pursue pastoral ministry. In this case the mentoring will focus on developing their leadership in their particular area. For example, a children’s ministry leader, or worship leader, may continue to grow in influence and skill, perhaps even becoming a part- or full-time staff member, but not be interested at all in general pastoral leadership.

Another more common example is the development of leadership within Bridge City’s cell ministry. Cell members who show interest and ability may become interns working closely with their cell leader. The cell leader is their primary mentor. Some cell leaders will show an interest and ability to equip and support beyond their individual cell, and may become zone coach interns and ultimately become zone coaches.

While it’s possible that a worship leader or zone coach might have a calling to pastoral ministry, and would continue to be mentored in that direction, growing in leadership in these areas does not automatically mean a person will become a pastor. Anyone with that calling or interest would be mentored in that direction, and ultimately need to go through the Affirmation and Commission process.

It is also important to note that all leaders who are affirmed and commissioned to pastoral ministry at Bridge City Community Church are called Pastors. One of these people will also be commissioned with the overall leadership of the church, and the leadership and equipping of the staff. This pastor is called the Lead Pastor.

## **The Four Seasons of Leadership Development**

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These four seasons of development as a person is exploring their call to pastoral ministry are intentionally a bit grey around the edges in order to be flexible with what it seems God is doing in the community and the life of the developing leader. Even considering that, it is our experience that this is a fairly accurate understanding of how leaders develop and where leaders might be in the different levels of growth. As a leader moves through the seasons several things change. The intentionality and focus of their mentoring deepens. Their areas of responsibility widen. The kind of supervision they have changes. Most importantly, their area of influence within the community broadens. When they start as a ministry intern it may be that only their cell group or ministry leader really is aware of their leadership gifts, but by the time a leader becomes a pastor, they can accurately be described as a pastor - a spiritual influence, shepherd, teacher and leader - by anyone in the Bridge City community.

## Examples of Differences Between the Ministry Seasons of Pastoral Mentoring

	Ministry Intern	Pastoral Intern	Associate Pastor	Pastor
<b>Who Invites into this role?</b>	Any ministry leader.	Any pastor in consultation with lead pastor.	Lead pastor.	Lead pastor, with the support of the Board.
<b>Who affirms their capacity to serve in this role?</b>	The same ministry leader.	Mentor pastor & lead pastor.	Board of Trustees.	The Family Members.
<b>Level of supervision</b>	Direct, high, accountable supervision.	Direct supervision by mentor pastor.	Supervised by mentor pastor with mentorship plan.	Normal employee oversight.
<b>Breadth of responsibility</b>	Narrow, single area.	Wider range of responsibility with the purpose of exploring gifts.	In a mentoring relationship, but able to lead semi-autonomously in specific areas.	Expected to function as a member of the pastoral staff with areas of autonomous leadership.
<b>Formal or informal?</b>	Either.	Formal mentoring relationship, formal or informal role.	Formal	Formal
<b>Volunteer or paid?</b>	Volunteer	Volunteer or stipend.	Volunteer, stipend or salary.	Volunteer, stipend or salary.

## Practical Elements of the Process

### The Importance of Transitions

The transition into each of these four phases is an important moment, both for the candidate involved, as well as for the people they serve. How this transition happens communicates something important to the leader as well as to the community of people they serve.

- Transition into the role of Ministry Intern.** This first transition is the most informal one. This would take place as a one-on-one conversation with the leader who wants to mentor the candidate, with the purpose of laying out the expectations and opportunities, and giving the candidate space to decide if they want to make the commitment. As necessary the candidate can be introduced to people in their ministry area as a new ministry intern. This would be the case for any emerging leader in any area such as cell interns or new worship leaders.
- Transition into the role of Pastoral Intern.** The mentor pastor and lead pastor meet with the candidate to lay out the expectations and opportunities of being mentored as a pastoral intern. The candidate would be introduced to the Family Members (letter or email) and congregation (introduction during worship) as a pastoral intern, identifying their mentor and their specific areas of responsibility. The church has the opportunity to pray for their developing ministry.
- Transition into the role of Associate Pastor / Pastor-in-Training.** Assuming the candidate wants to move forward, the mentor pastor and lead pastor would present this candidate to the Board of Trustees, laying out a formal mentoring plan based on the Values for Spiritual Leadership, and identifying the mentor pastor. The candidate would be introduced to the Family Members and congregation as a pastor-in-training, called associate pastor at Bridge City, identifying their mentor and specific areas of responsibility. The church has the opportunity to pray for them in their ministry responsibilities.

- **Transition into the role of Pastor.** As some point in the mentoring of the associate pastor / pastor-in-training, the candidate and mentor would discuss the candidate's desires to move forward seeking the affirmation of their ordination by the church. The candidate believes they have made good headway in their mentoring plan, and their mentor affirms that. With the approval of the lead pastor, the support of the board, the candidate begins the Affirmation & Commission process. Upon completion of the A&C process, the candidate comes before the church to receive their affirmation of God's ordination in their life, and the commission to their task as spiritual leader in this community.

## **The Steps of Affirmation & Commission**

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An Associate Pastor / Pastor-in-Training is a leader on an intentional track toward full pastoral ministry, who has been affirmed in their mentoring process by the lead pastor, any mentors and the Board of Trustees. Being identified as an Associate Pastor / Pastor-in-Training is an indication that a formal mentoring process is underway through which the person will ultimately be affirmed as a pastor. At some point in the mentoring process the candidate and their mentor working with the lead pastor will decide that the way forward is clear to officially pursue Affirmation & Commission. When that happens the following steps will unfold.

**1. Announcement:** The Lead Pastor will formally announce to the Family Members and congregation that the candidate is being put forward for A&C.

**2. Congregational Involvement:** At the announcement, the church will be invited to participate in the first phase (3 months) of this important process by:

- **Praying** for the candidate and their ministry.

- **Directly affirming, encouraging and supporting** the candidate during this process.

- **Responding to an A&C Response** (A response card or perhaps online survey) answering simple questions based on the 4 central values in the Values for Spiritual Leadership document. The purpose of this response is to gauge the community's sense of the candidate's leadership and calling. These responses would be collected over a 30 day period, from the official announcement.

**3. A&C Team:** Working with the candidate, the Lead pastor will select a team of 7-10 people to give a more in-depth reflection on the ministry of this person. This team would include a variety of people, ideally 2 board members, 2 staff members, and 3-5 Family Members of different demographics. These team members would be invited to prayerfully respond to a more in-depth evaluation based on the details of the Values for Spiritual Leadership document. These responses would be collected within 60 days of the official announcement

**4. Review & Process Feedback:** Mentor or lead pastor would review feedback from the congregation and in-depth reflections, and synthesize it into a useful summary of encouragement, affirmation and growth areas.

**5. Set A&C Service Date:** If the response, including the mentor pastor and lead pastor, is unqualified support, then the date for the A&C service can be set within 2-3 weeks. Thus, in the shortest case the entire process would take 3 months.

**6. Continued Mentoring Plan:** If the responses, including the mentor pastor and lead pastor, suggested the need for more development in certain areas of the Values for Spiritual Leadership, then working with the candidate, a plan would be laid out for how those things can be addressed (or begin to be addressed.) This plan would include definite timelines for re-evaluation, and a clear sense of when the candidate could come back to the congregation for affirmation.