



Dear Church Family

March 15, 2024

In late 2023 a task force was formed to explore methods of deacon election that differ from the method we currently use. The current method, as outlined in our current Constitution and Bylaws, worked well when we were a small church, but has become unwieldy as we have grown. In addition, our method has not adequately ensured, prior to election, that candidates were aware of the responsibilities of being a deacon and were willing to serve should they be elected. The task force was charged with researching methods used by other churches and recommending a new method for Earle Street.

The task force researched the deacon election methods of ten similar Baptist churches and found that in all ten there was a process where members nominated people to fill deacon positions. Those nominations were then evaluated – either by a select group (such as the pastor and the deacons) – or by a group specifically formed for that purpose, followed by an election. After considering the options, the task force recommends a similar approach, tailored to benefit from the structure already in place at Earle Street.

The Constitution and Bylaws Committee and the deacons have reviewed this approach and recommend that we temporarily suspend the Constitution and Bylaws provisions for deacon election for 2024 (only), use the recommended new method for the 2024 deacon election, and, after the 2024 election, gather feedback from the congregation and all parties directly involved in the election. Based on that feedback we will tailor the process as needed and propose changes to the deacon election provisions in the Constitution which, if passed, would then be in effect for 2025 and the following years.

Proposed Constitutional changes would follow the process required by the Constitution: *“Notice of the proposed amendment shall be given at a business meeting and published in the church newsletter at least two weeks prior to the date of the meeting at which the vote is taken. Amendments shall take effect when approved by two thirds of the members present at a church conference.”* Please note that we are not recommending amendments to the Constitution and Bylaws at this time.

To that end, you will find the following information in this packet:

- 1) [Motion to Endorse the Proposed Deacon Election Process for 2024](#)
- 2) [Questions and Answers Concerning Proposed Deacon Election](#)
- 3) [Motion to Suspend Constitution and Bylaws Provisions for Deacon Election for the 2024 Election](#)

These two motions will be presented, discussed and voted on at the April 3, 2024 Church Conference. The first motion will be to endorse the new deacon election process and will require a majority of “yes” votes to pass. The second will be to suspend the Constitution and Bylaws and will require a “yes” vote of 3/4 of the people present to pass. We anticipate a call to vote by ballot. There will be no provision for absentee ballots, however, in-service workers are considered “present” and may cast their ballots that evening prior to going to their place of service during the Church Conference hour.

The motion to suspend and the 2024 process were reviewed by the deacons on Feb. 25, 2024. They agreed to support them by a vote of 13 in favor, 1 against, and 1 absent.

Please review these materials and plan to be present on April 3 for the discussion and vote.

Respectfully Submitted,

Deacon Election Task Force (Ed Hogan, Margo Love, Amy Moore, Gary Strickland, Donna Walker, Jim Wooten)
Constitution and Bylaws Committee (Stuart Moore, Mary Beth Young, Calder Standridge)
Earle Street Baptist Church Deacons

Worship

Missions

Fellowship

Ministry

Spiritual Growth

Motion to Endorse the Proposed Deacon Election Process for 2024

For the 2024 deacon election, the deacons move that the church endorse the deacon election process as outlined below.

***** 2024 Timeline *****

April 3,	Church vote to endorse this process and suspend the Constitution and Bylaws for 2024
April 4-13	2024 Committee on Deacon Nominations ¹ is formed (see page 4)
April 14	Committee on Deacon Nominations meets and nominations open for 2024 deacon election
April 28	Nominations close
Mid-Late May	Informational meetings for nominees
July 7	Slate of deacon candidates presented to the church, with photos and biographical info
July 21	Deacon election
August	Review and revision of the process by the Deacon Election Task Force, with input from the Committee on Deacon Nominations, deacon nominees and candidates, and the congregation
Sept/Oct	Potential motion from Constitution and Bylaws Committee to change the Constitution and By-laws for 2025 and following

***** Deacon Election Process Summary *****

- Nominating** - Prior to the deacon election, beginning in early April, a new committee, the Committee on Deacon Nominations, will solicit nominations from the church body for the open deacon positions.
 - Any church member may nominate people to serve as deacons. There is no limit to the number of nominations a person may submit.
 - Nominations will be open for two weeks.
 - The nomination form will be available on paper and electronically, and will include:
 - Eligibility requirements² and qualifications³ for deacons (see page 5)
 - The names of members ineligible due to currently serving as deacon or on the Committee on Deacon Nominations
 - Space for the name of the nominee (Required)
 - The nominator's reasoning for why the person meets the qualifications (Optional, but highly encouraged)
 - The name of the person submitting the nomination (Optional)
 - The nominating process will be considered confidential, and there is no requirement for the person making the nomination to inform the nominee or to confirm their willingness to serve.
- Screening** - From the submitted nominations, the Committee on Deacon Nominations will complete an initial screening process, eliminating those who are ineligible.

3. **Informing** - The committee will then contact the eligible nominees and invite them to a meeting to explore the possibility of serving as deacon at ESBC. At this meeting the committee will review the Deacon Job Responsibilities and the proposed Deacon Qualifications, answer any questions from the nominees, encourage them to pray about their ability and willingness to serve, and provide a date by which they should return a signed acknowledgement that they understand and meet the qualifications for deacon and are willing to fulfil the deacon responsibilities.
4. **Selecting** - The committee will prepare a slate of candidates for the church from those who are eligible, willing, and able to serve. The number of people on the slate will be equal to the number of open positions. The slate will represent the diversity of the congregation (demographics of gender and age, along with spiritual gifts, longevity of membership, previous deacon experience, and organizational participation).

As part of developing the slate, the committee will determine the appropriate terms of service for nominees who will fill unexpired terms. Anyone nominated who has not previously served as an ESBC deacon will serve a full three-year term. The committee will notify the nominees who will be on the ballot and as well as those who have not been selected during the current year but may be considered in the event of a vacancy.

5. **Presenting** - The committee will present the slate to the church at least two weeks prior to the deacon election and will include photographs, biographical information, and terms of service for each nominee.
6. **Electing** - Deacon election will be held on the third Sunday in July. Each member will receive a ballot with the names on the slate, their terms of service, a checkbox for voting for each name, and a space for comments. Members will vote by checking to affirm each name and may provide optional comments. A candidate must receive 50% of the votes +1 (a simple majority) to be elected. The outgoing deacons will count the ballots and will notify elected candidates, the chairperson of the Committee on Deacon Nominations, and the church.

If one or more candidates does not receive a simple majority of the votes, the outgoing deacons will notify those candidate(s) and will request that the CDN present a new slate of candidates (which may be a slate of one), from the current list of eligible nominees, to fill the remaining open position(s). The follow-up election will be held as soon as possible, with two-weeks' notice to the church.

¹ **Committee on Deacon Nominations (CDN):**

For 2024, the Committee on Deacon Nominations will consist of the following seven members:

- A chairperson selected from the Deacon Election Task force members
- From the Worship Cluster – the Sanctuary Choir Representative to the Music Council (2024)
- From the Missions Cluster – the Leader of the Local Missions Team (2024)
- From the Ministry Cluster – the At Large Representative to the Senior Adult Ministry (2024)
- From the Spiritual Growth Cluster – the Sunday School Director (2024)

- From the Fellowship Cluster – the Food Services Representative (2025)
- From the Administration Cluster - the chairperson of the Nominating Committee

For future years, the seven members of the Committee on Deacon Nominations will be:

- A chairperson from the previous year’s CDN, elected by the previous year’s CDN.
- From the Administration Cluster - the chairperson of the Nominating Committee
- One person selected from the Worship, Missions, Ministry, Spiritual Growth, and Fellowship clusters, chosen by the cluster representatives. For the Missions Cluster, the cluster representatives should also confer with the ministry liaisons when selecting their CDN member.

CDN members must be a church member over 21 years old, be active in the church, not be a current deacon (with the exception of the Nominating Committee Chairperson) or staff member, have a general knowledge of how ESBC operates, and be acquainted with a broad range of church members.

CDN members may submit their own nominations through the process but may not be nominated as deacons for the year they serve on the committee.

The Senior Pastor and Deacon Chairperson will assist and advise, but the responsibility for preparing the slate of candidates falls to the Committee on Deacon Nominations members.

The members of the Committee on Deacon Nominations will serve from April 1 of one year to March 31 of the following year, with the majority of the work to be completed between April 1 and July 1.

The Committee on Deacon Nominations will remain on “stand-by” throughout the year. If a deacon vacancy arises, the deacons will decide whether an election should be held to fill the open position, or whether the open position will remain until the next scheduled election. If an election is to be held, the current CDN will prepare a new slate (which may be a slate of one), from the previously acknowledged nominees.

²Deacon Eligibility Requirements (from current Constitution and By-Laws)

“Those eligible for election must be at least 21 years of age, have been a church member for no less than one year, and must be on the active church roll. Deacons who are rotating off will not be eligible for election for one year. Deacons serving unexpired terms will be eligible for re-election. Staff members and their immediate family (parents, children, spouses, and siblings) will be ineligible for election.”

³Deacon Qualifications (proposed)

While we recognize we are all flawed, imperfect people, in constant need of God's grace, we ask that as a spiritual leader, a deacon of Earle Street Baptist church should strive to be:

- A committed follower of Christ, growing toward a mature faith
- Actively involved and participating in the life of the church, using one's gifts through appropriate service in the church
- Committed to seeking God's vision for the church, have the interest of the whole church at heart, and working to help the church carry out its vision and mission
- A peacemaker within the congregation, seeking unity in Christ
- Demonstrating a life of positive personal witness to all they meet
- Demonstrating a consistent witness in their home life
- Practicing stewardship of time, talents, testimony, and treasure
- Temperate in all areas of one's life

(Scriptural basis for deacon ministry: Acts 6:1-4; Romans 12:1-8; Romans 16:1-2; 1 Timothy 3:8-13)

Questions and Answers

Q: Why are we considering changing our election procedure?

A: From time to time, churches revise procedures to address shortcomings or changes in circumstances. Earle Street has done so in the past. While there are no “perfect” procedures, those past changes have been made to address particular problem areas.

Q: What are some of the changes that have been made in the past, and what led to those changes?

A: There have been several. A glance through the church bulletins/newsletters reveals some of the changes.

- In the 1920’s and early 1930’s, the church voted on successive Sundays. Those who received the highest number of votes on the first Sunday comprised the ballot for the actual election. The ballot contained twice the number of candidates for the vacancies to be filled. Only those receiving a majority of the votes cast (over 50%) were elected. In 1928, this required voting on four successive Sundays to fill all the vacancies.
- At least by 1940 (and continuing into the mid-1960’s), the slate of candidates (still twice the number of vacancies to be filled) was nominated by the Board of Deacons. It still required a majority vote of those present to be elected, resulting in runoffs on some occasions.
- By the mid-1970’s, probably to address the self-perpetuating nature of deacons nominating the slate to be voted upon and to broaden the leadership base, the church returned to two successive Sunday votes; the first to nominate a slate, the second to elect. A list of all the *men* who were eligible was printed in the newsletter. They continued to nominate twice the number needed to fill the vacancies.
- In the early 1980’s, apparently to simplify the procedure *and* to eliminate “winners” and “losers”, the church did away with nominating a slate of more candidates than were needed. They moved to the system of submitting a ballot with blank spaces equaling the number of vacancies. The congregation voted (only in-person votes at that time) and those receiving the highest number of votes filled the positions.
- Also, in the 1980’s, the procedures were revised to include women as eligible candidates for the first time. Jean Cochran was elected in 1983, Wilma Brown soon after; but for the most part it was still predominantly male. This led to a reintroduction of the list of eligible members to try to broaden representation.
- Also, at one time you had to be present to vote. This kept homebound members and those who were away on that particular Sunday from being able to vote. Election procedures were amended to allow absentee voting.

Q: What precipitated the desire or need to change the procedure at this time?

A: At various times in recent years, the deacons have discussed the need to change the basic structure of our election procedure. They recognized some of the perceived weaknesses within it:

- The list of those technically eligible was so unwieldy, it was difficult to locate the names of those who were true candidates.
- Sometimes, despite reminders, strong candidates who were not willing to serve failed to remove their names from the list, resulting in votes being “wasted”.
- Many people, particularly newcomers, did not have a wide range of knowledge of people in the church and could not make informed choices.
- People tended to vote disproportionately for those who were visible in worship on the day of the vote.
- Of particular concern, because the votes were so widely dispersed, people were sometimes elected with as few as 10-15 votes.

The deacons and ministerial staff considered alternative methods, recognized that all had strengths and weaknesses (but none were perfect) and never felt enough urgency to make a change.

What they *did not recognize* was how vulnerable this procedure made us to a systematic effort to essentially “stack” the deacon body with people with a particular agenda. In 2022, that occurred... and in 2023, in response to that effort, it occurred again. It became evident that a new procedure needed to be developed.

The deacons appointed a study group to make recommendations.

Q: How did the committee go about its study?

A: Prayerfully and diligently are the words that come to mind. We have met many times over the past six months. We secured and studied the examples of deacon election procedures from ten churches across the spectrum of Baptist life.

Q: What were your findings?

A: One thing that stood out was that none of these churches used a system like ours. All had a committee that considered potential candidates and recommended those candidates to be voted upon by the church at large.

The ways in which they did this varied. The procedures for screening candidates varied. The composition of the committee that made the recommendations varied. The composition of the slate that was recommended varied (some had more candidates than vacancies, while others recommended the required number of candidates to fill the existing vacancies).

We studied all of these, weighed the merits of each and sought to match the methods that best fit our particular church setting.

Q: What would be the most significant points in the proposed changes?

A: These fall primarily in four areas-

- *Input of the Congregation as a Whole:* The congregation gets both the first word and the last word.
 - The first step in the process is gathering nominations from the congregation that will be valuable and instructive in helping the Committee on Deacon Nominations (CDN) identify not only those who have been widely perceived as leaders in the past, but also those who are recognized for their contributions and potential by a segment of the church but are perhaps not as well known in the larger congregation.
 - Everyone who is eventually elected to serve as a Deacon will have been affirmed by at least 51% of those who vote in our congregation (as opposed to the present procedure).
- *Stronger Preparation for Those Who Accept the Role of Deacon*
 - An informational session outlining the qualifications and expectations of a deacon will be provided for all candidates nominated by the congregation. This affords each candidate clarity about the responsibility to be undertaken and the opportunity to prayerfully determine if he or she wished to be considered before the church votes.
 - Unlike all the churches studied, our current procedure does not provide any systematic preliminary opportunity for such clarification and reflection prior to being presented as a candidate for deacon.
- *Composition of the Committee on Deacon Nominations:* Our concern was that this committee be representative of the wider church, as opposed to some fixed group of the same individuals who make these recommendations year after year.
 - Some churches have the deacons recommend the slate (as ours once did). We rejected that concept because of its propensity to self-perpetuate and limit wider representation.
 - Some churches elect the committee. While we saw that as preferable to one group selecting the slate each year, we felt an election of the committee each year was cumbersome.
 - We looked at our current organization and determined that the best way to get input from a wide representation of informed and active church members was to take advantage of the cluster structure we already have in place. It is the cluster representatives who have first-hand knowledge of the people who carry out the work of the church.
 - A new committee would be chosen each year, with only one person (chosen by the committee to serve as the next year's chairperson to provide continuity and experience) serving in consecutive years. No one serving on the CDN would be eligible to be elected that year as a deacon.

- *Composition of the Slate of Candidates for Deacon Election:* The objective of the CDN would be to present a slate of well-informed, highly qualified candidates who, together with those already serving as deacon, would provide a broad representation of our church life and a strong spirit of cooperation.
 - The slate would consist of the number of candidates equal to the number of vacancies to be filled.
 - The goal would be to have a balanced group of deacons in terms of gender, age, spiritual gifts, longevity in the church, and previous deacon service.
 - The church would vote for each candidate individually, with a vote of 51% affirming his or her election.

Q. Why would we limit the number of candidates to the number of vacancies to be filled?

A. We discussed and debated this at length and agreed on this recommendation for the following reasons:

- Having a limited number of candidates allows the church members to express their support for each candidate. We anticipate that many people will think, “I would be happy to support ANY of the candidates on this slate”, and this method allows members to express their support for the deacon candidates without having to choose one over another.
- This method allows the church to affirm the candidates, while providing a safeguard that no one is elected without the affirmation of a majority of the church members.
- The committee nominating deacons will be focused on preparing a slate that would result in a balanced group of deacons as stated above. Adding additional candidates would make it difficult to maintain the balance.
- If we increase the number of candidates, we will need to continue the current method of filling unexpired terms as stated in the Bylaws. Currently, elected deacons “draw lots” to determine who fills the unexpired terms. Deacons would not know the length of their terms when they agree to serve prior to the election.
- Adding more candidates creates a slate of “winners” and “losers”. A person could find himself or herself on the slate for multiple years, providing photos and biographical profiles each year, and yet, never be elected.
- Providing a larger slate of qualified candidates is likely to result in a broad distribution of votes, which can result in a person being elected (or not) by a very slim margin. Here are a few examples, using round numbers to make the math easy: 6 openings, 10 candidates, and 100 people voting, for a total of 600 votes.
 - Scenario 1: Everyone likes all the candidates equally and spreads their votes evenly. In this case each of the 10 candidates would get 60 votes. Of course this is not likely to happen, however, if a few church members shift their votes (for example, votes for each candidate total: 68, 67, 66, 64, 62, 58, 56, 54, 52, 53),

then the election would be determined by a very small margin (candidate #6 receiving 58 votes, and candidates 7-10 “losing” with 56, 54, 52, and 53 votes).

- Scenario 2: Each person chooses their top 6. In this case, four people could get 400 of the 600 votes, and the remaining 200 votes would be split among the remaining 6 candidates. If those were spread almost evenly, it could result in people being elected who were not supported by at least 50% of the congregation, and again, with a small margin between the people who were elected and those who were not.
- Because of the broad distribution of votes, it is possible that two (or more) candidates on the slate could get the same number of votes, and if those two are “sixth” in terms of votes, this would either result in a runoff election to determine the sixth deacon or some sort of selection by chance. (The method of resolving ties would need to be determined and specified in the Bylaws.).

Q. Why not just provide a list of all the candidates who were nominated and are eligible?

A. We also considered this but it reduces the possibility for a balanced group of deacons, would eliminate the ability to provide photos and bios prior to the vote (assuming that’s a large number of people), and again, would result in people being elected with a small number of votes and without the visible support of a majority of the church.

Q. If one or more people on the slate do not receive 50%+1 of the votes, isn’t that harmful to those people?

A. Yes, it would be difficult. However, remember that the committee is presenting a slate of qualified people who they believe the church will support – and that the people on the slate understand the responsibilities and have agreed to fulfil them. It is unlikely that the slate will include a candidate who would *not* receive 50%+1 of the votes. However, we will include a space on the ballot for comments, so each person will be able to note their reason if they do not support a person, which would provide valuable insight to the committee and an explanation to the person or people not elected.

Q. Why do you recommend suspending the Constitution and By-laws for this first year?

A. We debated the merits of proceeding directly to voting on the changes to the By-Laws versus suspending them for a year. In some ways, going ahead with the changes was easier, but the shared wisdom of both our committee and the Constitution and By-Laws Committee was that we should try the procedure, have congregational feedback, and make any needed tweaks before making a final proposal.

Motion to Temporarily Suspend Constitution and Bylaws Provisions for Deacon Election for the 2024 Election

We, the Constitution and Bylaws Committee, make a motion to temporarily suspend the Deacon Election provisions in the ESBC Constitution and Bylaws for the 2024 Deacon Election, and, for 2024, to use the method endorsed by the congregation.

Provisions to be suspended for 2024 are highlighted and underlined below:

Deacon Election

There will be eighteen Deacons with six Deacons rotating off each year. Deacons will serve a three-year term beginning on September 1. On the fourth Sunday of June, after notification through the church newsletter no later than the first Sunday of June, the church, by ballot, will elect the appropriate number of Deacons to replace those whose terms are expiring and to fill any vacant unexpired terms. The Deacons will determine if a special election is necessary if a vacancy occurs during the year. The church must be informed at least two weeks in advance of any special election in the newsletter. The Deacons will be responsible for providing a means for absentee balloting in any deacon election.

Those eligible for election must be at least twenty-one years of age, have been a church member for no less than one year, be an active resident church member, and able to perform the duties of a Deacon. Deacons who are rotating off will not be eligible for election for one year. Deacons serving unexpired terms will be eligible for re-election. Staff members and their immediate family (parents, children, spouses, and siblings) will be ineligible for election. The outgoing Deacons will conduct the count of the votes and will ascertain the willingness of each nominee to serve. The members receiving the highest number of votes will be elected. In case of a tie, the tie shall be broken by casting lots.