

Baptist Heritage studies Elders in Baptist Churches – is it a case of turning history upside down?

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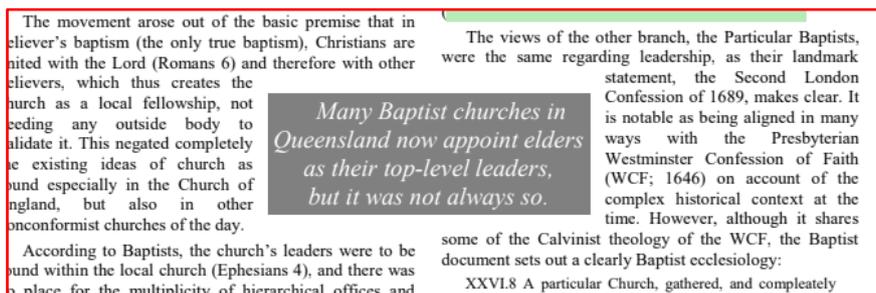
Eldership in Baptist churches in Queensland is the topic of the latest publication of Baptist Heritage Qld. This historical and contemporary report is printed in the newly released journal of the Society, *QB Forum*. It shows that there has been a remarkable change in this office in recent years which has radically transformed the shape of Baptist churches.



Once the position was almost completely confined to the honorary position of 'life elder' which was almost a form of Baptist 'sainthood' for long and meritorious service in a local church. The earliest churches mostly followed the historical biblical and historical leads of the earliest Baptists by appointing pastors and deacons for the spiritual oversight and practical ministries of the church. Clear evidence from the earliest times shows that the ministries of 'pastor', 'elder' and 'bishop' are synonymous.

The *QB Forum* article shows how various forces caused a radical change to this approach. It reports that a recent survey of churches reveals that at least 60% of churches now have some form of elder position which is mostly an administrative body. However, this survey shows that there is widespread confusion across the churches in the appointment, function and status of this office which seems to have been introduced without any overall guidelines or principles.

This situation is all the more concerning because in many cases, elders exert high levels of power and in some cases with questionable accountability, even to the extent in some cases of being virtually self-appointing. There is no evidence of any denomination-wide training or regulation of the position, or any consistent biblical or theological guidelines. The current Baptist Union of Queensland position makes it purely a generic position.



The *QB Forum* issue in which this article is published is available from Baptist Heritage Qld (BHQ) (phone 07 3376 4339 kopittke@tpg.com.au. Website <https://www.bhsq.org/>

BHQ invites subscriptions for their journal at a cost of \$10 individual or \$20 church which includes membership in BHQ. *QB Forum* is published three times a year and available in electronic format or printed.

Other topics in recent issues of *QB Forum* include a study of trends in Baptist church and ministers over the last 20 years, the story of the humble beginnings of three now flourishing churches, the origins and backgrounds of Baplink and a fascinating account of 'Lutheran Baptists' at Ipswich.

All of these issues and more are available for purchase while many earlier issues can be found on-line at <https://www.bhsq.org/bhq/forum/extracts/index.html>