



3. UNDERSTANDING CHURCH GOVERNANCE

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In God's preparation of Moses for leadership, He specifically taught him what to do. In Exodus 4:15 God says of Aaron and Moses, "I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do." Therefore, what must an elder know to lead effectively? He needs to understand the difference between church governance and church ministry.

A. Rationale

(Read abbreviated portion of Exodus 18:17 – 32 – *This should be included in a slide*)

Church's are known for their ministries. When church members meet, they proudly talk about the success of their respective church ministries (i.e. youth, children, men & women ministries). Ministry is correctly viewed as the front line of Christian service. Yet, all ministries need some degree of organizational structure to be effective. Thus, governance is required; for it is the soil which supports and nourishes church ministries and programs (i.e. Grecian widows Acts 6:1-7)

1. Basic Organization

(I would design a slide that shows a basic hour glass being "governance" on the top and "Ministry" on the bottom. In the top part of the hour glass, I'd put Board of Elders, Senior Pastor and Chair whereas in the lower part, I'd place Senior Pastor, Staff and Ministry Leaders/volunteers. A horizontal line through the middle of the hour glass would separate descriptions of governance versus descriptions of ministry)

For Example:

Governance

Board of Elders
Discern Ends
Head – Think
"Decide what is to be done"

Ministry

Staff/Volunteers
Implement Means
Hands – Do
"Decide how it will be done"

Initially, individuals organize themselves very informally, with the same persons doing both the planning/decision-making (governance) and front-line ministries. As any organization matures and grows, these two functions become increasingly distinct. The Board concentrates on governance, while staff and ministry leaders concentrate on running ministries.

2. Distinction between Governance & Ministry

Analogy:

“Governance has more in common with parenting than with management. Good parents who give as much freedom to their children as they can handle, but always with clear limits, and always with expectations, will see them thrive.”

Les Stahlke in *Governance Matters*

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General Paton once said something to this effect: *“I never tell anyone to do anything but that I first tell them what I want done and then I look forward to see how they’ll exercise ingenuity to get the job done.”* That is good description of Board governance.

Governance:

Boards resolve; ministry leaders & staff act. In this way most Boards delegate the implementation of their decisions. Boards define the ends (outcomes) to be achieved. They perform a head function. In other words, elders are elected into the position to think. They may or may not actively be involved in ministry themselves. If they are involved in ministry they take direction from the assigned ministry leader like any other volunteer. Thus, a board functions as a board only when it is in session.

Ministry:

Ministries (programs) are most often implemented by pastoral staff or assigned ministry leaders. They deal with the “doing” and means to achieving the end result. When an elder Board is left to itself, it will always tend to default to the doing side of ministry or the management of programs. Programs always generate urgent demands and issues whereas thinking more broadly about what it is we’re trying to achieve usually doesn’t result in immediate tangible rewards. However, when this happens, governance is sacrificed.

Summary:

Ministry programs are expected to do things right. Governance is responsible to do right things.

3. Are Governing Boards Biblical?

There is often a tension between the term “elders” (Biblical term) and a Board member. Thus, the question arises, “Are Boards biblical?” The Bible does not speak about corporate Boards. They are more a reflection of our corporate society. Especially smaller churches may push back on the corporateness idea because they are more tribal/family oriented. However, we do live in a culture where our government demands of any charitable organization appropriate accountability and direction. This is best done by a Board of Directors. Thus, the argument of a corporate type of Board comes down to *“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s”* (Matt. 22:21).

(Slide)

New Testament – Functional Leadership & Authority

- Based on recognized giftedness
- Membership based on profession of faith (& baptism)
- Embraced & lived out Biblical principles

Today – Formal Leadership & Authority

- Boards are now required – tax purposes
- Compliance with provincial (Society Act) & federal legislation (CRA)
- Constitution & By-laws
- Formal membership beyond professed faith.

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Important Clarification:

The Board only has a “life” when it is in formally-called meetings.

- No one speaks for the Board unless the Board has ‘spoken.’
- The Board speaks with ‘one voice’ or not at all.
- Importance of clear minutes to communicate final decisions.
- No individual has authority unless given by the Board.
- When you leave the Board meeting, you function under the Senior Pastor’s or Board Chair’s authority (depending on task).

The Wisdom of Seeking Counsel

“For lack of guidance a nation falls, but many advisers make victory sure” (Proverbs 11:14)

“Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.” (Proverbs 15:22)

“For waging war you need guidance, and for victory many advisors.” (Proverbs 24:6)