



4. ELDER'S DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Rev. Don Neufeld

A. *Uninformed Board Functions*

a) Rubber Stamps

This represents the extreme hands-off, passive board. Of all the ways church Boards may function, this incurs the least involvement and time commitment. It most characterizes a Board with a strong leader or where the pastor has accumulated a long exemplary tenure. Because of his success and long tenure, the Board members trust him implicitly.

b) Guardians of the Gate

These Board members believe their primary task is to keep an eye on the pastor. They function as watchdogs. Initially you might assume this involves pastoral accountability or legitimate monitoring of pastoral performance, but it's more than that. Usually this is more about control and preserving the status quo. These churches and Boards are usually suspicious of the pastor. (Union mentality)

c) Keepers of the Peace

These elders deem their job to keep everyone happy for the sake of peace and church unity. While this is true in both small and large churches, it's characteristic of many small churches that pride themselves on being one happy family. Scripture does encourage unity (Rom. 15:5-6; Eph. 4:1-6) but often this approach degenerates to placating the "squeaky wheel." As a result, a small minority of one or two negative individuals control the church.

d) Representative Democracies

These Board members view their role primarily as representing various groups (factions) within the church. Yet, leaders are called to lead not represent various church groups, especially factions. Factions characterize spiritually unhealthy churches (1 Corinthians 1:10-17; 3:1-9). The idea behind a representative democracy is that all opinions are equal, but in reality they aren't. Some are better than others, and informed opinions are better than uninformed opinions.

e) **Micromanagers**

This represents a highly proactive, hands-on, time-consuming board approach. Some small churches hire a pastor to do the work of the ministry

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(preach, pray, perform weddings/funerals, etc.) while they run the church (This is a reversal of the biblical emphasis found in Ephesians 4:11-13). The problem with micromanaging is that it guarantees the church will remain small and ineffective. It reveals a lack of trust in staff, creates leadership and operational bottlenecks and stifles creativity. It also does not allow the Board sufficient time to deal with the more important things.

Solution: Delegate! Delegate! Delegate! Leave any micromanaging to the staff; those on the front lines of ministry who know best what to do. Let them lead and handle the day-to-day operations of the church.

Why?

- **Time** – The staff, not laypersons work with the entire church on a day-to-day (8-10 hours plus) basis. They know the church inside and out. They also have time to properly carry out their task.
- **Training** – Staff members are generally more trained for church ministry than lay leaders. Most competent staff members take advantage of continuous learning opportunities.
- **Close to their Ministries** – Staff members have first-hand knowledge of problems and ministry opportunities. They know and understand the situations first hand, therefore they should make the decisions or at least have much input into them.

The collective wisdom of individual ignorance can be devastating to team morale!

B. Five Primary Functions

1. Pray

Elders are to pray on behalf of those in their congregation. Twice James mentions prayer in James 5:13, and in verses 14-15. A Board must also pray for their staff. Staff is on the front-lines, often waging an intense spiritual battle. They need to be under girded with prayer. Also, the Board that prays together and for one another usually works well and stays together.

2. Provide Oversight

In Acts 20:28 Paul exhorts the elders of the city church of Ephesus to “keep watch over yourselves and all the flock.” That’s called congregational oversight. They give oversight to:

- **The Church’s Spiritual Condition** – The Board should regularly check the spiritual vital signs of the church. They must ask, How are we doing spiritually? Are we a vital, Christ honoring body? Or are we dragging spiritually, and if so, why?
- **The Church’s Ministry Direction** – Although every church’s biblical mission is rooted in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19, 20), the

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Board is charged to articulate what it may look like in their respective community. They are to protect the mission and vision from being diluted by other issues in general and problems in particular that can sidetrack the church from the “*main thing.*”

Purpose refers to an organization’s reason for existence whereas; vision speaks of its preferred future. The two are not synonymous. Mission and purpose speaks of what the church will do today, whereas vision speaks to what the church will become tomorrow. Every church needs a vision that compels them forward.

- **The Pastor’s Leadership** – The board gives guidance throughout the year to the pastor’s leadership. The Board owes its pastoral staff three things:
 - i) **A Job Description** - which defines the pastor’s responsibility, primary relationships, limitations upon authority and how they will be evaluated.
 - ii) **An Annual Evaluation** - Is the pastor effectively helping to achieve the agreed-upon goals of the church? What is the quality of relationships within the church? Usually a review or evaluation is conducted by the chair or a committee of the Board, with a report to the whole Board. The evaluation should identify both accomplishments and areas of future growth. It should bring tensions and frustrations into the open and explore how they could be managed better.

The scope of the pastor’s annual review should also include the personal dimension. Is the pastor maintaining a healthy balance between work, family, and personal life? Does she or he have family worries? Financial problems? Hobbies? Longer term career plans? Health considerations? Etc.

Therefore, the review process should be a two-way conversation, with the pastor invited to suggest how the Board could be more helpful and how it may be contributing unknowingly to staff frustration.

iii) Support. - There may be areas of disagreement between a Board and its pastor from time to time but the relationship must be one of trust and mutual support. A pastor cannot serve a Board well that he does not respect. A Board cannot allow a person it does not respect to serve in a pastoral office. The pastor must either be supported or dismissed.

A Board can express its support by acts of special thoughtfulness besides the periodic pay increase. They may sincerely inquire into how things are going, give an occasional encouraging word, express public appreciation, and remember the pastor's family birthdays and anniversary. All of these are appropriate and are not costly.

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3. Make Decisions

Most would agree that elders are mandated to make lots and lots of decisions that affect the life and health of the congregation. In the New Testament – though they weren't necessarily referred to as Boards, the Twelve for example, made a critical decision in the life of the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:2-4) and then gathered the disciples to announce that decision. And much the same took place at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15.

If the first step in delegating is to assign responsibility for implementation, the second is to provide accompanying instructions commonly known as policies. Through policies it adopts; a Board can give direction and reduce its risk of getting lost in details. Policies are based on past learnings. They function much like the boundaries, end lines, and goal lines of a football field. They are built on values and, at the same time, perpetuate values. Therefore, a Board exercises leadership through policies.

Recommendations:

- a) **Boards Inventory their Policies & place in a *Policies and Procedures Manual*.** Only then is it possible to see which ones are out-of-date and need to be discarded, which ones need to be revised, and where policy gaps exist.
- b) **Boards Consciously Work from a Policy Perspective.** Policies are defined as "*The standard decisions in answer to important, often repetitive questions or problems.* Boards should examine each agenda item to determine if it is already spoken to by an applicable policy, or if a new policy is needed. Instead of reacting to individual concerns and questions as they arise, a Board should establish a policy which applies uniformly to all applicable situations.

Policies are <u>defined</u> as the beliefs and values that consistently guide or direct how a church Board makes its decisions. These are standard decisions that answer questions or problems that are important and often repetitive.

Example: Instead of setting salaries of individual employees, the Board adopts a salary scale. Instead of deciding on individual honorariums, the Board adopts a standard honorarium for visiting speakers accompanied by legitimate expenses.

Six Areas of Policy Development:

Ministry Means

- i. The Board's job and expectations of itself
- ii. The senior pastor's job and his expectations
- iii. The relationship between the Board and the senior pastor.
- iv. Personnel Policies- These affect employment, wages and salary, employee benefits, employee conduct, etc.
- v. Congregational Policies - These address such matters as church membership, weddings, funerals, benevolence, rental of facility, counseling, emergencies, grievance process, discipline, etc.

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Ministry Ends

- vi. The Board's expectations about the outcome of the church's mission and vision. If the church is participating in the District Partnership Agreement, this will be included in the church's *Ministry Advancement Plan*.

c) Boards use Consensus Decision-Making

It is recommended that Boards use consensus, not compromise to develop and establish its policies. Consensus does not necessarily have to mean unanimity. It does however require the Board to discuss the issue thoroughly before voting. This may include conflict at times. Poor boardsmanship means going along with a bad decision or wrong decision for the sake of unity or because the pastor encourages it. A healthy Board learns to trust each other and is willing to risk healthy debate and disagreement.

For consensus decision making, Board members agree to support the final decision of the team even if they disagree with it. They agree to disagree. At the end, all should be able to say that they either agreed with the decision or at least had their day in court. The idea is to pursue unity but not unanimity.

4. Engage in Planning – Develop an Advancement Plan

Many church leaders will support planning publicly while privately voicing skepticism. Yet, effective Christian leaders continue to maintain the key to church effectiveness and health is engaging in a strategic planning process.

Planning is not a panacea nor is it optional. Planning is essential part of church governance.

“The difference between an innovative and effective church and one that is plateaued and declining is that a growing and effective church has a clearly defined purpose and a strategy to achieve it.”

- George Bullard

What do we mean by Planning?

Planning not only helps you to anticipate the future, it permits you, within limits, to create the future. In the absence of planning we are the victims of our fate. We take what we get. We are totally in a reactive mode. Through planning, we can become proactive. We can have influence, not total control, over the events which come into our lives.

A plan is a framework for collective effort. It permits everyone within the church to see his/her contribution in the context of the whole. A single musician can play by ear alone, but an orchestra needs music. Good planning is one of the most cost-effective activities a Board can engage in.

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Planning is not making tomorrow’s decisions today. The purpose of planning is not to decide what should be done in the future but to decide what should be done now to make the desired things happen in an uncertain future.

A plan by itself is static – frozen in time. Planning however, by the way of contrast is dynamic. It is an action verb. It reaches out and thrusts itself ever onward. This is what caused an experienced church leader to say, “*The plan is nothing – but planning is everything.*”

Although planning is vital to any vibrant organization, do not elevate your plan to holy writ. Do not hold it too rigidly. Do not freeze things in place at the very time when change is accelerating all around you. Do not assume that the plan will replace on the need for spot decision-making. To paraphrase an old proverb, *plan your work, work your plan* – and be prepared to amend your plan to take new needs and opportunities into consideration.

Review the four key components of MAP

Who Plans?

The first step in a formal planning process is for the Board to initiate the process. This is part of a Board’s mandate to lead.

Boards that do not take an active role in the planning process are placed into a reactive mode. A Board can and must delegate some planning functions to the administration, but the responsibility for initiating a strategic organizational plan resides with the Board.

5. Give Feedback and Advise

Often, the question arises, who really leads the church, the Pastor or the Board. The answer is the Board leads through the Senior Pastor. Essentially, the Board has one employee, the Senior Pastor. However, this relationship works best when they each affirm one another and communicate “*I believe in you.*”

Board versus Pastor?

- The Board is the guardian of the vision and effectiveness of the church.
- The Board is guardian of the values and commitments by which the church functions.
- The Senior Pastor is hired to lead the church within this framework.

Therefore, the Board accomplishes its work through the Senior Pastor.

- The Board delegates its responsibility to one person – Senior Pastor

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- The Board Chair & Senior Pastor are parallel leaders.
- The Senior Pastor organizes and leads staff (Paid & volunteer) to assist in accomplishing the work.
- The Board’s most significant decision is the selection and care for the Senior Pastor.
- Communication is open, but staff are directed by the Senior Pastor (Board members cannot give Board directives to staff).

Wise pastors look to their boards for advice. And wise boards give it. Though they weren’t necessarily pastors of a church, Timothy and Titus were constant recipients of Paul’s advice. There is “*wisdom in the counsel of many.*” It is important to keep in mind that a board’s advice is different from its decision-making. It is not imperative that the pastor or staff follow the board’s advice; they have a choice. However, when the leadership Board makes a decision, it is final, and pastor and staff are expected to follow through on it.

B. Three Occasional Board Functions

1. Selecting a Senior Pastor

The Local Church Constitution of the C&MA in Canada states that “*the pastor of the church shall be called by the Board of Elders and appointed by the District Superintendent* (Article IX, Section 1). This means that the responsibility of calling a pastor does not rest with the congregation but rather with the elected eldership. Although the Board of Elders decides whom to call, they should do everything possible, short of taking a straw vote, to determine how the membership feels about the candidate. This is usually done by asking the membership to contact members of the Elder’s Board if they have comments or concerns.

This doesn’t mean, however; that the Board chooses other pastoral staff. This is the sole responsibility of the senior pastor, not the Board. If the church is without a senior pastor and in need of staff persons, the Board must wait until the church has a pastor and let him choose other staff persons. However, a wise senior pastor will usually involve the Board in this process.

2. Arbitrating Disputes

“Conflict is necessary and indispensable. There is no conflict only when no new decisions are made or no implementation of new decisions is necessary, which means death . . . Conflict is either destructive or constructive. It is never benign. It is constructive when it is functional; it is destructive when it is not channeled . . . What turns conflict into a destructive force is the lack of respect.”

Ichak Adizes in *Corporate Life Cycles*

Conflict is the inevitable result of human interaction. Wherever two or three are gathered, there will be differences which may lead to conflict.

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Analogy:

Some useful parallels can be drawn between conflict and fire. Fire is one of life’s essentials. We need it to cook, to keep warm, to cleanse, and to smelt. But when fire rages out of control it becomes unfriendly and even deadly.

Conflict can, in the same way, serve a useful purpose, it is evidence of life, that people care, that they are sufficiently committed to something to be in conflict over it. Conflict is evidence that there is more than one way of doing something. But like fire, conflict can become destructive. It can detract or even destroy the church. Jesus said, “. . . *household divided against itself will not stand*” (Matthew 12:25). The challenge facing leaders everywhere is to respond to conflict in such a way as to produce a positive outcome.

Since there is no perfect church and no perfect pastor, there will be times when differences over any number of issues will arise. Thankfully, the Alliance has a grievance process in the Local Church Constitution called *Discipline And Restoration Policy For Members Of Local Churches Of The Christian And Missionary Alliance In Canada*. This will require the active involvement of elders in working toward a solution.

Helpful Advice . . .

WEIGH YOUR CRITICS, DON'T COUNT THEM

a) Some Critics Deserve to be Ignored - Antagonists

Reggie McNeal in his book, *A Work of Heart* comments that every pastor/leader needs to weigh his critics, don't just count them. What he means is that one doesn't give equal weight to every criticism. Once you know the source of the criticism, you can either choose to address it or ignore it. Nehemiah's leadership and construction quality of the Jerusalem wall was criticized by Sanballat and Tobiah. ". . . *If even a fox climbed up on it [wall], he would break down their walls of stone*" (Neh. 4; 3). Nehemiah could have become absorbed in responding to his critics. He could have spent all his time defending himself. In stead however, he said: "*I am carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?*" (Neh. 6:3). Nehemiah reckoned that Sanballat and Tobiah were nothing more than antagonists and he chose to ignore them.

b) Other Critics are Imperative to Heed – Leadership Core

Other times, however, when criticism comes from our leadership core, you ignore it at your own peril. It's good to adopt a Church Board policy where no one is allowed to say, "*People are saying.*" Either you say, "*who said it and what was said*" or you agree to not raise the issue. The term "*people are saying*" can be a manipulative ploy that does not allow you to weigh the comment. When a problem is identified together with the source, it allows the leadership team to be solution oriented.

c) Important to Weigh Critics' Motives – Don't Demonize the Opposition

The other thing I would like to say, be careful you don't demonize opposition. Here again, it is important to weigh their motives. Sometimes conflict may arise not from a desire to challenge the leader but due to genuine differences that need to be

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heard and worked out. If you routinely demand compliance on all issues, you're going to be in trouble. We all need accountability in our lives. Spirituality does not flourish without it.

d) Stay Issue-Centered

I think the key is to keep the conversation issue-centered instead of personal. Once your eyes get off the issue, you can easily resort to destructive personal attacks and vindictive behavior. Usually whoever frames the issues will win the discussion so don't make it about you personally but about the mission.

3. Protecting the Pastor

There are people for various reasons that don't like the senior pastor and will do everything within their power to undermine him and/or his ministry, hoping he'll leave the church. In accordance with Matthew 18:15-19, the Board has an obligation to deal with the "trouble maker" by issuing either a warning or commencing with a discipline process. It is imperative that Boards do not stand by and passively watch this kind of thing unfold before their eyes. It puts the pastor in the difficult position of having to defend himself and if he leaves, it encourages the antagonist to engage in a repeat performance.