

## Church Government

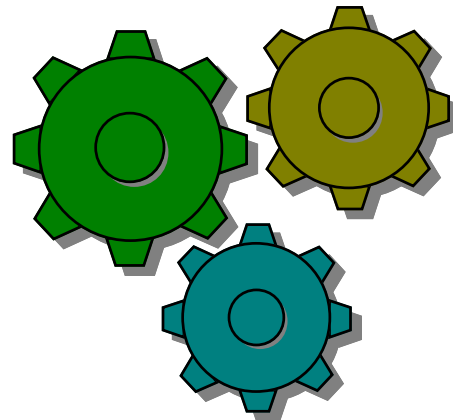
The early church in Acts seemed to have had several different successful models of church government. At least they were there in embryo form. Today different denominations and personalities choose a form of government they consider appropriate and probably most styles have some Scriptural validity. These range from more of an autocratic approach, at one end of the spectrum, to that of congregational government at the other. Whatever style you use, it is important to be culturally sensitive.

However, church governments based upon the dynamics of *team leadership* are most appropriate in the sociological climate we live in and many different denominations are finding this approach most useful. The Church at Antioch is a good model to base this approach on.

The common analogy of team ministry is that of a rugby team. Many players work together for a common goal; that of winning the game. They complement one another in the different positions assigned to them, under the direction of a captain, the leader. This leader is normally the pastor while the players are other people in significant roles within the church.

A close examination of the New Testament indicates that the role of leadership is two fold. *Firstly* of providing spiritual oversight and direction - people in this office are commonly referred to as elders. *Secondly* of administration and all the practical matters that need attention in running a church. The latter tasks are generally carried out by people known

as deacons. Both positions are important for the local church to progress. Sometimes people take on several roles depending on who is available.



***Team leadership gets the job done more effectively.***

The actual titles given to these functions are inherently unimportant. What is important is that the tasks are completed.

A popular, useful model for church government is based upon the Eldership / Council concept. The elders have the overall responsibilities that go with spiritual oversight and the running of the church, while the Council Members not only include the elders, but also people heading up major departments within the church. These may include home group leaders, a children's worker, missions coordinator, worship leader, an outreach leader and administrator.

### Elders

- Keep to the qualifications mentioned in 1 Timothy 3, Acts 20v28. You do have to take note as

to whether a potential elder's dependent children are disciplined and cared for effectively. However Satan can bring unnecessary condemnation in this area.

- Do not act in haste in appointing elders. Have them sit in on the elders' meetings for several months. During this time observe whether they fit or not and how they relate to the existing elders. Note also whether they display humility.
- Make sure that you gain the approval of the church before appointing an elder. This should be obtained through a special church family meeting or through a pulpit announcement of the intention for the appointment over a period of several weeks. Listen carefully to any feedback you get.
- Make certain that the spouse of the elder is happy about it and is a trustworthy person.
- Many Elders' Courts find it beneficial to have both husbands and wives at the weekly meetings.
- The Senior Pastor is normally looked upon as the leading elder.

## Council

Advantages of a Council are;

1. *Communication.* The elders must keep in touch with the people in the congregation. They need to know their needs and their true spiritual condition. As executives in large corporations need to stay in touch with their clients if their products

are to remain relevant, so feedback by Council Members must be given to the elders as to what the peoples' thoughts are about various issues. Effective communication is vital.

If a major change is introduced into the church it can be useful to get the initial reaction of the Council members before it goes to the congregation. After all, they will more than likely know how best to approach their people about the matter and what the reaction will be.

2. *Encouragement.* Leaders heading up various departments will at times need support. This may come through prayer or even just reporting in as to what is happening. You can not give encouragement if you do not plan to regularly meet with them. A

Council provides that opportunity. By sharing any difficulties at Council level, solutions may be found from the experienced people present.

3. *Unity.* Unity really flows on from the previous two points. Meeting regularly together allows leadership to express their opinion in a loving atmosphere, where 'to stand, you need to understand'. Psalm 133 promises that the outcome of unity is blessing. Many major splits originate because leadership is not communicating in the way it should.

## Points to note

- Having a Council made up of the heads of each department means

that only working members are permitted to belong on the Council. The advantage of this is that you are far less likely to have power struggles or unwise decisions made. If on the other hand a non working member is voted or invited on, then they may have a hidden agenda and only be interested in ideas and concepts.

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- It is useful to review all positions (including that of pastor and elders) possibly once a year. Never have the approach that once appointed you are there for life. It need not make the pastor insecure as his work would be ineffective with less than 50% of the leaders' support.
- Elders should have the say as to who comes onto the Council.
- Only have people on the Council who have a good spirit and generally have proved their worth.
- Seldom have a husband and wife on the Council at the same time, unless it is absolutely necessary. Sometimes when discussions may get heated the couple may overreact and start a counter group within the church. If hurtful accusations are made at Council level to one's spouse they can be hard to erase from the mind.
- Do not just meet as a Council for prayer and business. Create opportunities for socialising. Be good friends with one another.
- Although it is advisable for elders to meet once a week, it is suitable for Council members to meet monthly.
- It is often useful to have someone other than the Senior Pastor to chair the meetings.
- As this is the governing body of the church, those present and any significant decisions agreed on should be noted in the minutes.
- It is not always possible for every leader of a department to be on the Council as the numbers may become too large for effective decision making. As long as fair representation is recognised other leadership can graciously accept their exclusion and notify the elders of any significant concerns or joys.
- Do not be hasty in making major decisions. Some people may agree intellectually with the decision, but it takes time for their emotions to catch up. If the decision is pushed through before that person is ready, there may be repercussions.

## Notes