

## Strategies for Effective Pastoral Leadership

### Shedding Old Structures

What if you could erase all the constitutional mandates and bylaw requirements that spell out, ad nauseam, all the committee structures for your congregation? It would be both liberating and alarming! The organizational chart that supported our ministries so well in the 60's and 70's today feels like an albatross that too often stands in the way of our mission. We yearn for a more nimble, purpose driven, streamlined, joyful functioning Church! It doesn't take nine people - in rotating, two year, thrice renewable terms - to accomplish our mission. It takes the empowerment of all the people, with clear communication and key leadership.

Imagine when the early apostles founded the Church. Though they were very familiar with the structures of the religious establishment, they had the gift and the necessity of a clean slate. They organized organically, free from layered hierarchy and complicated bureaucracy. I'm guessing they huddled up for some strategies sessions, but mostly they listened to the calling of the Holy Spirit.

In recent years, many congregations have shifted from a rigid committee structure to a flexible team approach. This model prioritizes the matching of people's passions and gifts with particular tasks. Teams often vary in size, with undefined terms, and less frequent meetings. For example, at quarterly planning meetings, the Mission Team might set vision and outline projects for the coming months, using creative and collaborative input. Then each volunteer would be assigned specific leadership tasks with the chairperson taking responsibility for periodic check-ins and support. No micro-managing at the committee level, and no droning on and on about tedious details during the meeting. The agenda: a time of relational connecting, worship, vision planning/project decisions, assignments.

Experimenting with such structural changes is fairly easy if your Constitution simply sets forth a governing body with the authority to organize committees as it sees fit. If, on the other hand, your bylaws spell out specifics about each committee, it gets a little trickier. Increasingly, congregations have "suspended" standing rules in order to experiment with some alternative models. This often results in fewer people serving in official capacities, but increased overall congregational engagement in the work of the Church.

If you decide to suspend your bylaws and take a sabbatical from your org chart in order to try a new organizational model, make sure your governing board (Council or consistory) is willing to entertain a spirit of permission giving. Some leadership boards now refer to themselves as permission assuming!! If a team has great passion around a good idea that will advance the mission of the Church, why would we say no!?!

Here are a few resources you may find helpful:

- "Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership" by Dan Hotchkiss (Note: This is the governance model currently being used by the Wisconsin Conference Board of Directors.)
- "Mobilizing Congregations: How Teams Can Motivate Members and Get Things Done" by John Wimberly, Jr. (Note: This is a highly recommended resource from the former Alban Institute.)
- "Moving off the Map: A Field Guide to Changing the Congregation" by Thomas G. Bandy (Note: This book and others from Thomas G. Bandy are recommended by Greg Watling and the good folks at New London UCC.)

Please share your resources and ideas on my [blog page!](#)

Blessings,

Franz