

## **Section One**

# **The Organizing Principles of a Congregation**

## **The Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development**

## An Overview

What are the categories you use to describe your congregation? What frameworks or assessment tools do you use? Is the best category size, age, location, growth status, worship style, denominational affiliation, facilities, discipling processes, pastoral leadership, programs for children, ethnicity, status in the community, or the primary age groups of the attenders?

Try the fuel and flavor of the organizing principles of congregations, and the stages of development of congregations in a life cycle analysis. For numerous years, the concept of congregations as spiritual organisms with life cycles has existed. Life cycles are one of many assessment categories that may include many of the categories mentioned above.

### Four Organizing Principles

A major element in understanding the life cycle of a congregation is to understand the pattern of the organizing principles that make up the various stages of congregational life. This life cycle is principle driven. The organizing principles are:

**Vision:** The current understanding of God's spiritual strategic direction for a local congregation that is cast by the leadership and owned by the membership.

**Relationships:** The relational processes by which persons are brought to faith in God through Jesus Christ, become connected to a local New Testament church, are assimilated into the fellowship life and care ministry of the church, have opportunities for spiritual growth and leadership development, and utilize their gifts and skills through Kingdom involvement.

**Programs:** The functional attempts to provide ministries, services, activities, and training for people connected to the congregation by membership, attendance, fellowship, or through relationships processes.

**Management:** The administration of the resources of the congregation, the decision making structure of the congregation, the formal and informal culture of the congregation, and the openness of the congregation to change and grow.

Every congregation has a life cycle. This life cycle begins with birth, followed by a period of growth, the achievement of adulthood and maturity, a period of aging, and then death or redevelopment. Looking at congregations according to their life cycle assists in developing the ability to see, understand and pursue opportunities and choices available to a congregation at a particular stage of development

### Stages of Congregational Development

The life cycle of a congregation includes ten stages of development. These ten stages relate to the five primary phases of the life cycle. These phases are, Phase One: Early Growth; Phase Two: Late Growth; Phase Three: Prime/Plateau; Phase Four: Early Aging; and, Phase Five: Late Aging.

The ten stages of development are, Birth, Infancy, Childhood, Adolescence, Adulthood, Maturity, Empty Nest, Retirement, Old Age, and Death.

Several observations need to be made concerning the pattern of the life cycle. **First**, the four organizing principles are present with varying degrees of strength and dominance at each stage of the life cycle. For example, at Birth vision is dominating. Relationships, programs, and management are present, but are not fully expressed or dominant.

**Second**, the life cycle is not strictly defined in terms of time. Each stage is more of a developmental progression than it is a natural result of a certain amount of time having passed. The stages from Birth through Adulthood tend to take about a generation of time. Defining time beyond that portion of the life cycle is difficult and not crucial to the process.

**Third**, progression through the various stages from Birth to Death is not inevitable. Development of a congregation can be halted, or a congregation may redevelop rather than decline to Death. Congregations will actually go through numerous partial life cycles where they redevelop forward to a new Childhood, Adolescence or Adulthood and then live out this new partial life cycle.

**Fourth**, another crucial concept is contained in the question: *Now that I know where my congregation is on the life cycle, how do I provide positive, spiritually based change leadership?*

### **Observations About Life on the Growth Side of the Life Cycle: Developing Congregations**

1. In order for a congregation to keep developing, it needs to focus on the organizing principle formula of the next stage of development.
2. Congregations can become dysfunctional and stop developing. Some congregations will then stalemate and move into a holding pattern that resembles Retirement or Old Age. Others will experience Death within a generation.
3. Vision and relationships fuel congregations on the growth side. Programs and management sustain congregations on the aging side.
4. No more than 25 to 35 percent of congregations are on the growth side of the life cycle.
5. The change and growth style utilized is different for different stages of the life cycle. This means that a project approach will work at one stage, a program approach at a second, and a process approach at another.
6. The leadership style of congregational leaders is different for different stages of the life cycle. Assessment of the leadership style of ministerial and lay leaders is crucial to determining the change and growth process that will be successful.
7. The issues to be addressed are different for different stages of the life cycle. Some of these are age-related issues, spiritual issues, change and growth issues, program issues, relationships issues, management issues, and vision issues.

### **Observations About Life on the Aging Side of the Life Cycle: Redeveloping Congregations**

1. The vast majority of congregations who do strategic planning, or attempt some journey of change and transition, are on the aging side of the life cycle. The percentage probably varies between 65 and 75 percent.
2. Because of their position on the aging side of the life cycle, congregations are being sustained by their management rather than fueled by their vision.
3. The change and redevelopment strategy is different for different aging stages. What works at one stage does not necessarily work at another stage. The prescription for change, or the intervention strategy, will be different.
4. The length of time it takes to produce lasting change is different for different stages of the life cycle. Generally, the more aging the congregation, the longer it takes to produce lasting change. The key element will be whether a fix or a solution can be achieved in a given congregation.
5. Some people feel there should be no aging side to the life cycle because congregations should redevelop with a new vision, a new life cycle, or an explosive curve of new, positive change and growth. This is the ideal. The ideal may happen less than 20 percent of the time. What about the 80 percent?
6. Death is not inevitable. The life cycle and stages of development are not deterministic. Congregations can and do redevelop and move forward to a new partial life cycle that may last a minimum of seven to nine years.
7. Having said that Death is not inevitable, congregations who are aging, are dysfunctional, and who wait until Phase Five: Late Aging to seek a turnaround are unlikely to experience a positive, successful future. They may not avoid Death.

## End Thoughts

Numerous sources have dealt with the life cycle as an assessment and learning or intervention tool for congregations. Here are three. Jere Allen and George Bullard, *Shaping a Future for the Church in the Changing Community*, Atlanta: Home Mission Board, SBC, 1981. Robert D. Dale, *To Dream Again*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1981. Martin F. Saarinen, *The Life Cycle of a Congregation*, Washington: The Alban Institute, 1986.

For more information on this subject or to inquire about conference, consultation, or coaching assistance for your congregation or denominational organization, contact George Bullard, Hollifield Leadership Center and Lake Hickory Learning Communities, 6692 Valwood Road, Conover, NC 28613-8759, Voice: 828-256-2126, Fax: 828-256-4989, E-mail: BullardJournal@cs.com.

**[Place Life Cycle Chart Here]**

## **Congregational Vision**

Vision is one of the four organizing principles of the life cycle and stages of congregational development. The others are Relationships, Programs, and Management.

The word vision probably rivals the word paradigm for overexposure during the 1990s. As such, vision is misunderstood, particularly in relationship to other concepts such as mission and purpose.

## **Core Ideology—Mission, Purpose, and Core Values**

Mission relates to the overarching, timeless sense of God’s direction that is relevant to a congregation. It is the eternal direction of congregations.

Mission is the ongoing sense of missional direction. It is generic and could apply to many congregations. In biblical terms, mission is the contemporary expression of a culturally relevant sense of the Great Commission and the Great Commandments. For a congregation, it expresses their understanding of a New Testament fellowship of believers.

The purpose of a congregation is the historical reason for its existence. It refers back to a founding purpose. It is a more concrete expression of mission that is congregationally specific. Purpose is everlasting. It is a past to present statement that characterizes a congregation's reason for being. It embodies the core values for the congregation.

The core values for the Kingdom of God are expressed in the core ideology. They are non-negotiable characteristics of congregations.

## **Vision**

Leadership consultant Burt Nanus defines vision as “a realistic, credible, attractive future for your organization.” [Nanus, 1995]

Researcher George Barna defines vision as “a clear mental image of a preferable future, imparted by God to his chosen servants, based upon an accurate understanding of God, self, and circumstances.” [Barna, 1991]

Vision is the current understanding of God’s spiritual strategic direction for a congregation that is cast by leadership and owned by membership. It is the ability to imagine with spiritual insight, and cast with inspired words, a vision of the future that may not be obvious, or discernable by linear projections.

Vision is not something written in fifteen words or less. It is a movement that is experienced and memorable. It is energizing. Vision embodies the current key leverage points or driving forces for a congregation. Proverbs 29:18 indicates that where there is no vision or current revelation from God, the people perish, or cast off all restraint. A healthy congregation has a strong, positive sense of the vision God has for it.

Congregations with clear vision find reasons to affirm what is right about their congregation, and build on that. The vision factor includes the attributes of hope, excitement, enthusiasm, and potential. These congregations celebrate God’s presence with great unity.

Vision is dominant in the life cycle of a congregation during the Birth stage. This founding vision generally has the strength to be relevant and active for up to a generation of time. Any succeeding vision may only be effective as fuel to drive the congregation forward for seven to nine years.

## **Source and Pathway of Vision**

Simply stated, the source of congregational vision is God. Vision that is brought forth from within a congregation should be the best possible sense of God's spiritual strategic direction for the congregation.

It should not be the vision of just the pastor and the staff. It should not be the vision of just a small portion of the laity, or a special interest group in the congregation. It should come from a prayerful petition to God the Father.

Prayer and discussion about vision can originate anywhere in a congregation. However, whoever controls the congregational resources becomes the gatekeeper of the vision.

The pathway for vision is generally congregational leaders. The sense of God's strategic spiritual direction, or His preferred future, is likely already present in many congregations.

However, a catalytic role, best played by leadership, needs to nurture the vision. Therefore, the role of the pastor and other leaders is crucial in the envisioning process.

Determining or clarifying a vision is difficult due to the "cacophony of voices" seeking to advocate one approach or another [Nanus, 1992]. Having someone who casts the vision is necessary and initiates the spiritual strategic journey.

The pastor is in the best position to articulate the vision. He can cast the image of a future that is unfolding. He can provide inspiration and wording for a vision statement.

The congregation can respond and participate in the molding and nurturing steps for the vision journey until there is empowering ownership of the vision.

## **Characteristics of a Vision and a Vision Statement**

Vision is something felt. A vision statement is something that is written down to have a set of words that delineate the vision. A vision statement can be beautifully written, and there still be no vision. A wonderful, fulfilling vision can exist, but never be written down.

When both the vision is present and powerful, and the vision statement is succinct and communicates; something of great beauty and power exists.

Here are a few characteristics a congregational vision:

- 1.** It represents God's strategic spiritual direction for the congregation. When members and regular attenders who have a commitment to the congregation consider their vision, they strongly feel this is something to which God has uniquely called them.

“Vision is the beacon, the sense of destination shared by the people who care most about the organization’s future.” [Nanus, 1995] The congregation must have fervent feelings about the vision.

**2.** It inspires enthusiasm and movement. People want to be a part of fulfilling this vision. They see in it the opportunity to grow spiritually and to serve faithfully.

“The right vision is an idea so powerful that it literally jump-starts the future by calling forth the energies, talents, and resources to make things happen.” [Nanus, 1995]

**3.** It must be widely owned, and not just declared by leaders. Members and regular attenders feel the vision from the inside out. They embrace it as their own, and not just as a good religious cause, dynamic ministry, or charismatic pastoral image to which they can give allegiance.

**4.** It is future-oriented. Vision involves the ability to be like Merlin in Camelot. He lived in the future, and looked back at the present. His task was to help others bridge the gap between the future and where they were currently.

Vision involves pulling a congregation forward toward a possible future. This is as opposed to trying to push a congregation from the present toward a better future.

**5.** The vision must be appropriate for the congregational context and preChristian, unchurched, and hurting people to whom the congregation feels called to minister.

Here are a few characteristics of a congregational vision statement:

**1.** It is simple, easy to say, easy to remember. **2.** It is fifteen words or less. **3.** It is empowering. **4.** It addresses the mission, purpose, and core values. **5.** It is broad enough to embrace the entire congregation. **6.** It is a trumpet call to excellence growing out of a passion call to Kingdom progress. **7.** It acts as a measuring rod for utilization of resources. **8.** It challenges the mind, and inspires the heart. **9.** It is biblically sound.

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## Casting Vision



## **Overview**

Vision is the current understanding of God's spiritual strategic direction for a congregation that is cast by leadership and owned by membership. It is the ability to imagine with spiritual insight, and cast with inspired words, a vision of the future that may not be obvious, or discernable by linear projections.

To understand the process of casting vision, it is necessary to know the source of vision, how it is developed, how to cast it, and how to know when you have vision. Vision should be cast in the context of the core ideology of a congregation. The core ideology involves the eternal mission, the everlasting purpose, and the enduring core values

Vision should be cast by a small group of initiating leaders representing the larger guiding coalition of the congregation. Thus, vision casting is a function of the leadership community or guiding coalition, and not just a single leader.

The pastor is the leader of the initiating leaders. As a result, he plays a significant role in casting vision. The vision casting will be most effective where the pastor is articulate, passionate, and genuine in his vision-casting role.

Vision is continually cast until at first the initiating leaders, then the enduring leadership community, and finally the active congregation are captivated by it.

It is possible that the vision will be written in a brief, succinct statement. However, a vision is not a statement of fifteen words or less that is memorized, but a movement that is memorable.

## **Where Does Vision Come From?**

Vision comes from God. Vision is initiated in the heart, soul, mind, and strength of God. Great ideas can come from pastors, staff ministers, and laypersons according to their gifts and skills. But true vision comes only from God.

God imparts vision to all people. It is generally realized earliest by the pastor or those initiating leaders who are seeking God's vision.

Nevertheless, we must also hold to the theological point that God can intervene and silently or dramatically impart His vision to any and all persons of His choosing.

Debate swirls around the issue of the source and the declaration of vision. Most would probably agree that vision comes from God. It is not man-made, but God-inspired.

Some would suggest that God imparts vision either only or primarily to the pastor. Various theologies and methodologies embraced by the spectrum of Protestants suggest a diversity of viewpoints on this.

This article is built around the concept that God may impart vision in various ways. Pastors can learn a lot about the vision and how to cast it by seeking to understand the movement of God in various parts of the congregational family.

A key point to consider is that regardless of exactly to whom and how God imparts vision, unless the leadership community of the congregation feels the passion and hungers to be a part of the movement of God in their congregation, there will be little fulfillment of the vision.

## How Do You Develop Vision?

Prayer is an essential foundation for the development of vision. Those who want to hear the voice of God must be seeking God. Prayer can help to filter out the non-visionary messages and help the leadership community to focus on God's message.

It is important to study two things in the development of vision. **First**, is to study God's Word to see what Scripture might say to you as a member of the leadership community. Study particularly New Testament stories of people with vision.

**Second**, study about the past, present, and future of your congregation. What is there in your congregation's history that might point to eternal truths that are relevant to current vision casting efforts?

What is happening in the congregation today that seems to be indicative of a current presence and movement of God? What is the future Kingdom potential of your congregation?

Dreaming is an important part of the development of vision. Ask yourself, *What seems impossible today, that if it could happen would dramatically transform the ability of our congregation to reach its Kingdom potential?*

Looking is an important activity in developing vision. Look at the lives of individuals and groups within your congregation and the various communities they serve.

What are the hurts and hopes of people? What vision might God be imparting to your congregation concerning its role in helping people reach their personal, spiritual potential?

## How Do You Cast Vision?

This may seem simplistic, but the first thing you must do to cast vision is to cast it. Too many times we hoard our ideas or insights about vision because we are not sure we have it right or perfect.

Trust God to use your words, and begin casting vision to individuals and groups such as the guiding coalition. Start with the initiating leaders and gain their ownership before you start openly casting the vision, and calling it vision, to the leadership community or guiding coalition, and the entire congregation gathered in worship.

Once you start casting vision, the second most important activity is to listen. Seek understanding through your listening. Listen to determine if people have correctly heard the message or movement that you are casting.

Determine if you need to change the words, images, metaphors, or analogies you are using to cast the vision so that it will be heard more clearly.

Listen to see if, as they respond to the vision you have cast, God seems to be speaking through them to provide any clarification or new understandings as to His vision.

Make sure that the vision cast is really a present-future vision. This means that it projects a clear understanding of a desired spiritual strategic future toward which God is pulling your congregation. Many visions are expressed as linear projections of the present into the future. These latter visions are too small.

As people seem to be captivated by the vision, begin to be bolder in the creation of a congregational movement that embraces the vision. Do and say more things in congregational worship experiences about the vision that is emerging and what types of changes and transitions this might call for in how the congregation actively lives out its faith.

Persons connected with your congregation will need to understand the cost of high expectation discipleship that tends to emerge from a passionate, visionary movement.

### **How Do You Know When You Have Vision?**

You have vision when you suggest that difficult decisions about congregational priorities need to be made based on the vision, and your congregation enthusiastically supports this.

You have vision when initiating leaders embrace with excitement, commitment, and competence the new actions your congregation needs to take to fulfill the vision.

You have vision when congregational members suggest Kingdom progress that is evident to them because of efforts taken to fulfill the emerging vision.

You have vision when at least 20 percent of the *Quad A's* can answer the Wal-Mart question. *Quad A's* are the average number of active, attending adults present in worship during the typical week. The Wal-Mart question happens like this: An active woman in your congregation is shopping in Wal-Mart. She encounters a man who has visited your congregation a couple of times in the past month or two.

They talk. The guest/prospect indicates that he is new to town and has visited several congregations. Your congregation is a faith community that appeals to him. However, he is having difficulty figuring out which of two congregations to join.

He asks your member, *What is so special or unique about your congregation?* Then the woman smiles and with great excitement and passion explains the vision of your congregation and the activities that are happening to fulfill the vision. In doing so, she uses her own words. But her words are words consistent with what many *Quad A's* might use when they describe the vision and its fulfillment. They are certainly consistent with what the initiating leaders would use.

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# What Are the Characteristics of Congregational Leaders Who Are Reaching Their Kingdom Potential?

## Overview

For congregations to reach their full Kingdom potential it is necessary for them to be led by leaders who are themselves on a spiritual strategic journey that is helping them to reach their individual Kingdom potential. These leaders must be willing to focus their spiritual strategic journey on congregational efforts to reach their full Kingdom potential.

Leaders must know their spiritual gifts, their acquired skills, and desired preferences to be able to function with full character, competence, relationships, and standards. Congregations must also be fully aware of the gifts, skills, and preferences of its ministerial and lay leadership.

Leaders who know who they are, where they are headed, and are intentionally trying to get there are likely on their way to reaching their Kingdom potential. The same is true about congregations.

Excellent leadership is not necessarily definable by a series of traits or skills alone. Excellent leaders do not necessarily conform to a certain set of content-oriented characteristics. Each leader is unique. No two leaders fit exactly the same mold.

There may be some process-oriented characteristics of leaders who are reaching their full potential. To share seven possible process-oriented characteristics is the purpose of the following list.

## Seven Characteristics of Congregational Leaders Who Are Reaching Their Kingdom Potential

**Characteristic One:** *They are leaders who are clear about their identity.*

Congregational leaders who are reaching their Kingdom potential have developed a clear understanding of their identity or personal core ideology involving the mission, purpose, and core values of their lives. They are clear about their role as servant leaders within the Kingdom of God.

Mission is the generic understanding of the role of a Christian individual within God's world and master plan. It is a personal understanding of the theology of human life.

Purpose is the specific purpose for an individual's life. It speaks to the life history of an individual. Core values are the values people have held dearly throughout their lives that form their personal culture.

**Characteristic Two:** *They are leaders who are clear about their destination.*

Based on their identity or core ideology, they have a clear sense of God's spiritual strategic direction for their lives. They are captivated by the vision God has given them for life, work, and ministry.

They seek to lead their congregation to have a shared understanding about God's spiritual strategic direction for them. They have settled the issue about whether the congregation exists to serve its leaders, or the

leadership exists to help the congregation fulfill its vision. Fulfilling its God-given vision is the only reasonable choice.

**Characteristic Three:** *They are leaders who seek to help congregations fulfill God's vision for them through intentional actions.*

Congregations are not just supposed to keep business. They are to be intentional about helping all people to have the opportunity for a full and eternally rewarding spiritual strategic journey.

Congregational leaders who are reaching their Kingdom potential lead their congregation to engage in intentional relationship experiences that seek to turn pre-Christians into fully devoted followers of Christ.

Leadership is a journey. All participants in the journey must have access to the power and authority necessary to take effective, intentional actions that will make a crucial difference in their ability to serve people and congregations.

**Characteristic Four:** *They are leaders who are focused on helping congregations to address the human hurts and spiritual hopes of individual people.*

Healthy leadership does not talk much about institutional success. It primarily talks about the transformation that is occurring in the lives of individuals and congregations in keeping with Kingdom principles.

It measures success not by the macro numbers of programmatic events, but by the micro numbers of dealing with the hurts and hopes of people—one at a time.

To know if leadership is healthy, ask the individuals in a congregation, and ask the congregations in a denomination or in affiliation with a parachurch organization.

**Characteristic Five:** *They are leaders who model servanthood that empowers staff, members, primary partners, strategic alliances, and various network relationships.*

Leaders who are reaching their Kingdom potential, are excited about it, and are not losing their flexibility have two qualities that characterize their service. One is servanthood, and the other is empowerment.

Servanthood is embodied in the biblical mandate to serve rather than to be served. Effective leadership is initiating, but it seeks to initiate in areas where those being served can be coached or mentored to become more effective. Effective leadership affirms the spiritual gifts, learned skills, and life preferences of those being served, as well as their mission, purpose, and core values.

Empowerment means that effective leaders understand that much more can be accomplished in a congregation or denomination for the Kingdom when staff, members, primary partners, strategic alliances, and various network relationships are all energized by an empowering vision that has captivated them.

**Characteristic Six:** *They are leaders who build an enduring congregational culture that has passion for the future mission fulfillment that extends far past the current leaders.*

Short-term success is sacrificed in favor of long-term significance. Healthy leadership does not insist that the short-term leader-initiated goals must be successful. They strive for enduring success that makes a transformational difference in the people and the congregations they serve.

They do not seek personal reward or honor, but seek to create a spiritual, relational, and learning climate that will outlive their ministry in the congregation. They rejoice when the congregation excels after they are led forward to a new place of service.

They weep when the congregation flounders following their leaving, afraid that they did not create a sufficiently enduring culture and leadership community. It is their hope that 50 years from now the enduring spiritual leadership culture established in the congregation will still be thriving.

**Characteristic Seven:** *They are leaders who know how to place individual and cultural diversity in perspective to the overall core ideology and envisioned future of the congregation.*

Membership and affiliation in congregations is more diverse than ever. Methods of operation and implementation at times mirror chaos rather than coordination. Healthy leadership is not threatened by diversity.

The paranoia that might affect individual leaders does not derail a congregation run by shared, servant leadership patterns. They pray for one another. They look for what God might be saying to them in the midst of crisis and chaos.

### **A Few Reflective Thoughts About These Characteristics**

1. While few of us may be compulsive enough to actually write down a personal core ideology and vision statement, I actually found this to be a great beginning point for getting alignment in my life, work, and ministry.
2. Leadership is developed and practiced in a context. The context being discussed here is congregations. Therefore, congregational leaders who are seeking to reach their Kingdom potential must do so in the context of helping their congregation reach its Kingdom potential.
3. The key issue is not the development of individual leaders, but the development of an enduring leadership community in congregations. Such a community is accountable to God and one another.

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# Congregational Relationships

## What is Congregational Relationships?

The word *relationships* does not have a clear, simple definition. This complexity is necessary to maintain the richness of the term and its use.

Relationships are the spiritual and relational processes by which persons are brought to faith in God through Jesus Christ, become connected to a local New Testament congregation, are assimilated into the fellowship life and care ministry of a congregation, have opportunities for spiritual growth and leadership development, and are mentored to use their gifts and skills through Kingdom involvement.

For simplicity the relationships process can be understood as the discipling process in a local congregation. It is the process or spiritual journey by which persons are disciplined into fully devoted followers of Christ.

Vision is the driving force that fuels a congregation forward. Relationships is the image factor that completes the flavor or identity of a congregation.

Relationships refers to all that is done to include people in the life of the congregation through activities such as evangelism, outreach, assimilation, and discipleship. Relationships is person-oriented and process-oriented, rather than program-oriented or project-oriented.

The question of relationships is, *how well are we doing in helping persons to be included in the Kingdom of God and the fellowship of a local New Testament congregation?* Thus, there are both vertical and horizontal dimensions.

Ministry or outreach focused on the congregation's context and missions are a part of relationships. When an existing congregation sponsors a new congregation, this is relationships. The ultimate purpose of relationships is to turn people outward in ministry to others, and to be on mission to fulfill the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandments.

## The Five Phases of the Relationships Process

The relationships process can be thought of in five phases. Although these phases are presented in a linear format, discipling or the relationships process is flexible and intuitive, and does not necessarily follow a sequential pattern. Various phases can be going on concurrently.

Relationships at its best focuses on the discipleship journey of each person. It is solution-oriented as opposed to offering a program fix or simplistic response to a person's need for spiritual growth and deepening relationships.

The relationships process as presented here is focused on necessary congregational actions, and not the actions of individual believers. Therefore, put on your congregational systems thinking hat as these phases are considered.

The five phases are Evangelism and New Member Recruitment; Entry and Initial Assimilation; Fellowship, Care Ministry, and Full Assimilation; Spiritual Growth and Leadership Development; and, Kingdom Involvement and Missional Life Style.

**Evangelism and New Member Recruitment:** The spiritual and relational process by which persons are brought to faith in God through Jesus Christ

Evangelism and outreach efforts relate persons to Christ. Involved is the process of nurturing lost persons or pre-Christians through evangelistic efforts to the point where they decide their relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

New Member Recruitment includes efforts to get believers who are unchurched involved in a regular, ongoing, and challenging congregational relationship. It also targets under-churched people who, although members or occasional attenders of congregational worship services or other events, do not have a regular, ongoing, and challenging congregational relationship.

**Entry and Initial Assimilation:** The spiritual and relational process by which persons become involved in a local New Testament congregation

Entry and initial assimilation efforts relate persons to a congregation. Involved is the process of generating and responding to visitor or guest attendance and retention, and worship or large group participation and involvement.

This phase covers efforts to help persons who decide to join a congregation, make a commitment or show a pattern of regular attendance, to feel and act as part of the congregation. In traditional terms these are new members.

Initial assimilation includes efforts to orient and clearly express to new members and regular attenders how they can become more involved in the congregation, and in an intentional discipling process.

Offering a definition is important at this juncture. Assimilation is the intentional process by which believers become identified with a congregation, and are included in meaningful fellowship, care, spiritual growth, and leadership developing activities.

**Fellowship, Care Ministry, and Full Assimilation:** The spiritual and relational process by which persons are assimilated into the fellowship life and care ministry of a congregation

Fellowship, care ministries, and full assimilation efforts relate persons to a group within the congregation. Efforts are made to include persons in regular and special fellowship activities of some affinity group.

In this phase, persons are considered a natural and regular part of the care focus of one or more groups within the congregation. Some type of spiritual support group embraces newer persons to help them feel that this group is family and this congregation is home.

Intentional efforts are made as a part of this phase in membership retention. It is at this point that some people may drop out of regular participation because the proper spiritual and relational networks were not established. When separation from the congregation occurs, efforts are made at conducting exit interviews.



**Spiritual Growth and Leadership Development:** The spiritual and relational process by which persons have opportunities for spiritual growth and leadership development

Spiritual growth and leadership development efforts relate persons to their calling. It involves spiritual gifts discovery and development. Persons are involved in gift-appropriate leadership development or learning experiences.

Individuals are nurtured in their spiritual journey. As persons mature spiritually, they can embrace and own their part in the vision casting of congregational leadership.

**Kingdom Involvement and Missional Life Style:** The spiritual and relational process by which persons are mentored to use their gifts and skills through Kingdom involvement

Kingdom involvement and missional life style efforts relate persons to servanthood. It is the involvement of people in ministry that uses their gifts and skills.

For some it becomes a stewardship of their total life. It involves the movement from success to significance to surrender.

## **What is the Role of Relationships in the Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development?**

Relationships joins with vision to fuel the forward progress of growing congregations. Congregations that are growing younger tend to focus on vision and relationships. Congregations growing older tend to focus on programs and management.

Infancy is the first stage of congregational development where relationships expresses itself in a fully developed or dominant form. At that stage it helps crystallize the identity and focus of a congregation. It also defines the discipling style of the congregation.

In practice relationships cannot happen haphazardly in a congregation. The relationships process must be an integral part of the strategies, structures, and systems of a congregation. Careful attention to the relationships process can enhance the effectiveness of the discipling process of a congregation.

Relationships is the main day-to-day factor contributing to qualitative and quantitative growth of congregations. After vision, it is the most important factor on which a congregation should focus its efforts.

**For more information on this subject or to inquire about conference, consultation, or coaching assistance for your congregation or denominational organization, contact George Bullard, Hollifield Leadership Center and Lake Hickory Learning Communities,**

## **Celebrate the New Millennium With 100 Days of Share and Prayer Triplets**

### **Overview**

Prayer is a vital part of the ministry of congregations. It is a major part of the fuel that provides energy and empowerment to congregations. Prayer movements in congregations seldom happen without some forethought or intentional action.

A decade ago I was introduced to a vehicle for organizing a short-term movement, which was simply presented as 100 days of share and prayer triplets. This occasional paper seeks to set forth some principles and methods of conducting a share and prayer movement in your congregation.

### **Why Celebrate the New Millennium With 100 Days of Share and Prayer Triplets?**

- 1.** A new millennium is a great opportunity to initiate a renewed emphasis on in-depth dialogue among congregational participants. At times it appears that people connected with congregations have lost the ability to communicate and dialogue at an in-depth level. Too much conversation is shallow and does not produce close and mature fellowship within faith communities.
- 2.** A new millennium is a great time for congregations as faith communities to commit to and covenant with one another that the interpersonal conflicts and congregational fights that have characterized many congregations during the previous two milleniums will not be allowed to characterize the new millennium. Beginning the new millennium with 100 days of share and prayer triplets is one way to seal this commitment.
- 3.** A new millennium provides a new beginning for interpersonal relationships in congregations. With an increase in the diversity of many congregations, too many people connected with congregations do not know one another, do not understand each others' cultural perspectives, do not comprehend the generational differences, and fail to realize the diversity of religious practices and backgrounds that people bring with them to worship each week.
- 4.** A new millennium provides a renewed opportunity to honor God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God is the focus of our worship. Jesus Christ is the head of the church. The Holy Spirit is our constant companion and guide. It is a fantastic idea to mark a new beginning by seeking to renew and strengthen our primary relationship with the Trinity.
- 5.** A new millennium marks a new beginning. It is appropriate to anchor a new beginning with a spiritual process that involves a large percentage of the active people in your congregation.
- 6.** A new millennium will bring significant changes and will require people to transition to new understandings. Some changes may threaten the spiritual or cultural comfort of people connected with congregations. Prayer is a way for people to deal spiritually and emotionally with the changes by which they are impacted, and the resulting sense of loss they are experiencing.
- 7.** A new millennium provides a great opportunity to begin new Kingdom initiatives. Share and prayer triplets are a great way to build person-to-person, and household-to-household ownership of any new initiative.

## What Should Be Your Expectations of the Results?

1. While 100 days of share and prayer triplets may not necessarily produce miracles in your congregation, it can sharpen the relational and spiritual sensitivity of many people connected with your congregation.
2. Share and prayer triplets can build relationships between people who have not had the opportunity to get to know one another. People of different age generations, tenure in their connection with the congregation, denominational and church backgrounds, and theological perspectives can build understanding of the faith journeys of other people.
3. Unfortunately many people in a congregation may never have learned how to pray for another person. This will provide an opportunity for them to experience the spiritual and emotional joy of praying unselfishly for others.
4. God answers prayer. Your congregation and the people connected with it may benefit greatly from answered prayer. Hopefully they will see the power of prayer and use it more often--especially in a servant way that benefits others.

## How to Celebrate the New Millennium With 100 Days of Share and Prayer Triplets

The concept of 100 days of share and prayer triplets is simple and straightforward. **First**, people are challenged to come together in triplets 10 times for 100 minutes each time over a period of 100 days. **Second**, the triplets are asked to spend their time sharing their personal hopes, hurts, and dreams, and sharing their affirmations, challenges, and vision for their congregation.

**Third**, the triplets are asked to pray out loud for one another and their congregation. **Fourth**, the triplets are asked to share with the congregation the progress being made in their triplets. **Fifth**, the congregation supports and unites around significance of the triplets through corporate worship and celebration.

**Formation of the Share and Prayer Triplets:** A leadership group in the congregation should take the initiative to form the share and prayer triplets. This may be the congregational staff, the deacons or elders, a congregational care team, a prayer ministry team, or a special group in the congregation.

Persons seen as participants in the leadership of the congregation should be specifically approached and asked to form a triplet. For this effort to be effective in impacting the entire congregation, a number of adults equal to one-half of the average weekly attendance by adults in congregational worship experiences needs to be involved in a triplet.

For example, if 150 adults are present on average in weekly worship experiences then the goal would be to have 75 adults to participate in a triplet, which would require 25 triplets to be formed.

Those persons asked to form a triplet should use the following guidelines in inviting people to be a part of a triplet. **First**, they should not be members of their household, close friends, or close relatives. **Second**, they should be people of a different age group, length of time connected with the congregation, and perspective on the life and ministry of the congregation.

**Third**, they should be willing to enter into a *no-exit* relationship. This means that each person will agree to stay actively connected to the triplet for the 100 days, even though there may be some challenging moments as the triplets seek deal with significant and meaningful issues.

**Sharing in the Triplets:** Triplet participants should share their personal hopes, hurts, and dreams, and their affirmation, challenges, and vision for their congregation. To initiate this they may need to engage in some trust building activities where they share their life story and spiritual journey with one another.

These trust building activities could be initiated in a large group setting where all the triplets come together for the first time and receive orientation and coaching. The pastor, staff ministers, and members of the leadership team should lead this orientation and coaching.

**Praying in the Triplets:** Triplet participants should pray out loud for one another and their congregation. Praying out loud is extremely important. This adds value to the ability of prayer to bless one another. Participants should lift one another up in prayer. The congregation and its health and Kingdom progress should be a subject of prayer.

Triplets could keep a journal of the key issues for which they are praying on an ongoing basis. Such a journal should include any statement of covenant and confidentiality the triplet establishes.

**Sharing with the Congregation:** A consistent and regular method should be used for the triplet participants to share with the congregation the progress being made in their triplet. One method is to ask a participant from a triplet to take three or four minutes in each worship service to share the joy of what is happening in their triplet.

A second way would be to have a triplet participant to write a short article about their triplet that could be placed in the church's newsletter or on its web site. Third, would be for triplets to share prayer requests, particularly related to the congregation, that could be placed on a churchwide prayer list for use by other triplets, or by the congregation at times they gather in small, medium, or large groups.

**Congregational Support for the Triplets:** The congregation should support and rally around the significance of the triplets through corporate worship and celebration. One way to do this is to have the worship themes tied to the suggested agenda for the triplets. This would reinforce what the triplets are talking about, and connect to the triplet movement people connected with the congregation who are not in a triplet.

At the end of the 100 days of prayer a corporate worship celebration should be conducted to rejoice concerning answered prayer and new relationships, and the congregation's renewed sense of community.

For more information on this subject or to inquire about conference, consultation, or coaching assistance for your congregation or denominational organization, contact George Bullard, Hollifield Leadership Center and Lake Hickory Learning Communities, 6692 Valwood Road, Conover, NC 28613-8759, Voice: 828-256-2126, Fax: 828-256-4989, E-mail: BullardJournal@cs.com.

# Understanding the Importance of the *60-40-20 People* in Your Congregation

## Overview

Congregations are all about people and their relationship to God and one another. As living organisms they have complicated interpersonal relationships. Various affinity groups within a congregation have a significant impact on the quality of life within the congregation. In congregations that are a generation or more old, there is a special group of people known as the *60-40-20 People*. These are people who have all three of the following characteristics.

**First**, they are at least 60 years old. **Second**, they have been on a Christian faith journey for 40 or more years. **Third**, they have been affiliated or connected with their congregation for 20 years or more. These three factors make them the primary stakeholders in many congregations. In a certain sense they believe the congregation belongs to them. They desire for the congregation to follow their agenda, and meet their long-term needs.

## What is the Importance of These People?

*60-40-20 People* play a very important role in the life of their congregations. They are the key financial and governance leaders in many congregations. Here are some affirmations of their role and some challenges concerning their role.

### Affirmations:

1. *60-40-20 People* are the keepers of the core ideology of their congregation. The core ideology includes the congregation's understanding of the eternal mission of a New Testament congregation, the everlasting or founding purpose of this particular congregation, and the enduring core values of the congregation. This is also known as the master or foundational story of congregations.

If a congregation is less than 50 years old these are the people who carry the oral tradition as to why and how this congregation was founded, and what values were hard wired in the congregational culture during the early years of the congregations. They often choose one of their group to put in writing this oral tradition as the congregation approaches a key anniversary such as their 25<sup>th</sup> or 50<sup>th</sup>.

*60-40-20 People* are the rudder of congregations. They keep congregations headed in the right long-term direction when short-term situations create a sense of whitewater. They understand the past to present of the congregation. They know what has worked and what has not.

2. *60-40-20 People* feel strong ownership of the vision and spiritual strategic direction of their congregation. They cast the congregation's vision to new people as they connect with their congregation. They genuinely want new people to feel the vision and sense of spiritual strategic direction that has been so meaningful and significant to them. They feel that their spiritual destiny, emotional well being, and social stability are intertwined with the success and faithfulness of their congregation. They want their congregation to do well, and be meaningful and significant.

3. *60-40-20 People* are the stakeholders in their congregation. They are faithful. Their attendance is regular. Their financial contributions are significant. The *60-40-20 People* may account for 50 percent or more of the financial contributions to their congregation.

They continue to fill many of the leadership positions. If their congregation needs volunteers to help with a project, they may be the first to sign up. They will probably continue to be active in the congregation through good times and bad times.

If family and contextual dynamics are favorable, the *60-40-20 People* are probably responsible for some of their children and grandchildren attending their congregation. If the parents or grandparents were not there, the children and grandchildren might be going somewhere else to church.

4. *60-40-20 People* love their congregation. They do not want anyone to speak ill of it. They also are very open in showing love toward their pastor and staff. They make pastor and staff appreciation days a delight for many clergy.

Because of their love for their congregation, when the congregation shows signs of aging as an organism, and actual decline in membership and attendance, they want something to be done about it. They will support efforts at congregational redevelopment that are consistent with their image of the congregation.

### **Challenges:**

1. *60-40-20 People* know the story of their congregation's history too well. They feel that the mission, purpose, and enduring core values of the congregation are unchangeable and not subject to debate. They want the present and future of their congregation to be clearly stated in their image.

When the congregation is more than 25 to 30 years old, or when it has been more than ten years since some great renewal or redevelopment in the congregation, the *60-40-30 People* are generally not open to changes in the basic character and nature of the congregation. They tend to believe that the solution to any great challenge is to redouble efforts and to show greater commitment to the basic values that brought the church this far.

2. *60-40-20 People* tend to confuse their faith in God through Jesus Christ and the culture of their congregation. They may see the two as inseparable. Therefore, any attempts to change their congregation may be interpreted as an attempt to change their doctrine or beliefs, or to change their understanding of the Bible.

They hold fast to Hebrews 13:8: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever." [NASB] This translates into a resistance to changing their congregation since they serve an unchanging Christ. They tend to believe that the solutions to the challenges facing the congregation can be found in past patterns and practices.

A few *60-40-20 People* fear that if their congregation so radically changes, those basic doctrines and Biblical beliefs will be compromised or the existence of their congregation could be threatened. Deep in their hearts a few people wonder about their own eternal security. They even question whether they will go to heaven if the congregation in which they have had crucial spiritual experiences no longer exists with doctrinal and Biblical integrity when they die.

3. *60-40-20 People* have difficulty adapting to fast-paced change that does not seem to affirm the core ideology of the congregation, and the accepted pattern of relationships and programs. The *60-40-20 People* may themselves create the situation where new attempts in relationships and programs are in conflict with traditional patterns.

They often do this by affirming the leadership of a newer, younger pastor or staff minister. They ask this new, young pastor or minister to help the congregation to grow. However, their interpretation of growth, and that of the newer, younger pastor or staff minister may not match.

The *60-40-20 People* want the congregation to grow by reaching young to median age adults with children, but they do not want these new people to change the basic character and nature of the congregation. Often the newer, younger pastors, staff ministers, and lay leaders do not understand the full message. They enthusiastically seek to reach newer, younger households, and in doing so intentionally seek to change the basic character and nature of the congregation.

4. In times of greatest conflict it may be the *60-40-20 People* who show the most opposition to their pastor, staff ministers, and lay leaders. They love their own image of their congregation, and rather than allowing it to change or fail, they will seek replacement of their current leadership. They may feel that their congregational leadership does not understand the true needs of the stakeholders.

### **What is the Proper Response to *60-40-20 People*?**

1. **Love them!** They are persons of worth created in the image of God to live and to love. It is difficult to work for the greatest good for someone you do not love.

2. **Respect them!** They are not unintelligent or unspiritual. They are people who have genuine and deep thoughts about their faith and their congregation.

3. **Understand them!** If core ideology changes are needed in the congregation, *60-40-20- People* are much more likely to be permission givers if they feel that they are understood.

4. **Lead them!** *60-40-20 People* want good sound leadership that loves the Lord, respects the stakeholders, and understands their uncertainties about the future.

5. **Empower them!** *60-40-20 People* are a tremendous spiritual and strategic resource. Their energies need to be empowered within the congregational systems

6. **Support them!** *60-40-20 People* will respond with great loyalty in congregational systems where they are supported as persons of worth. They will return the favor.

7. **Pray for them!** *60-40-20 People* need and desire the highest level of spiritual support. In the midst of great certainty about their congregation lies spiritual uncertainty.

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## Congregational Programs

### What are Congregational Programs?

Programs are the functional attempts to provide projects, ministries, services, activities, and training for people connected to the congregation by membership, fellowship, or through relationships processes. Programs require planning, scheduling, budgeting, leadership recruitment, materials and equipment resources, implementation, and evaluation.

The programs aspect of the life cycle represents the specific projects, ministries, services, activities, and training characteristics of a congregation. While primarily focused on the membership of the congregation, they may also relate to programmatic attempts to provide services and ministries to the various communities, publics, target groups, and clients served by the congregation.

While some programs are present in a congregation from its first day of existence, concentrated effort to develop and implement programs comes during the stages of Childhood, Adolescence, Empty Nest, and Retirement.

Projects, ministries, services, activities, and training include, but are not limited to worship, music, education and training, and weekday and community ministries. Programs are focused on bringing new external resources into the congregation. They are task-oriented. Specific, concrete projects that the congregation engages in, such as building programs, are examples of projects that fit the broader category of programs.

### How are Programs Categorized?

Programs can be categorized or organized in many ways. Some congregations view their programs in multiple ways. They often follow categories set by their denominational family.

**Functional:** A common way to look at programs in the life cycle is to consider the generally accepted functions of a congregation. Worship, Sunday School, discipleship, evangelism and outreach, congregational care and fellowship, and missions and ministry are programs found in churches.

For many congregations the denomination or parachurch group with whom they are affiliated suggests these functional areas. The parent organization provides field service support and materials, which congregations may buy to support these functional areas. Loyal congregations are urged to organize their programs around accepted designs.

**Calendar:** Some programs revolve primarily around a calendar. The organizing category for some is the season of the year. For others, the liturgical calendar or the denominational event calendar sets the congregational focus.

The calendar determines which programs receive the greatest emphasis during certain times of the year, and what the curriculum content of that program will be. For example, family emphasis programs are often



scheduled around Mother's Day and Father's Day. Obviously Christmas and Easter call for a unique set of productions, ministries, services, and activities.

**Family or Age Group:** A third approach to programs may be to organize by family and household characteristics, and by age categories. Emphases may relate to preschoolers, children, youth, young singles, singles again, young adult households, median adult households, senior adult households, and old age households. Within this context could be target ministries for men and for women.

Larger membership congregations often organize their staff around such family or age stratification. The goal is to provide an overall focus on the needs and desires of various age groups. The directional focus of a congregation can at times be seen by the age group to which they give the most focus.

**Disciplemaking:** An increasing number of congregations in the future will organize their programs around the phases of relationships or disciplemaking. These five phases are Evangelism and New Member Recruitment; Entry and Initial Assimilation; Fellowship, Care Ministry, and Full Assimilation; Spiritual Growth and Leadership Development; and Kingdom Involvement and Missional Life Style.

In these congregations, programs support the relational process of relationships. These programs will tend to be dynamic and empowering.

These four ways of looking at programs categories are merely beginning points, and not an exhaustive list. Also, they are not mutually exclusive; they overlap. Congregations will generally organize around several of these categories. Innovative, future-oriented congregations revolve more around family or age group, and disciplemaking. These two categorizations support the idea of relationships more closely.

## **What is the Role of Programs in the Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development?**

Programs play an extremely important role in congregations. They provide structure and continuity for the relational emphases of congregations. Without the development of programs, many new congregations would not survive Birth, Infancy, and Childhood.

Programs developed during Childhood provide a foundation from which congregations can leap forward in response to the movement of God in their midst. Congregations keep moving forward through the vehicle of their programs during times when the vision and destination for the strategic spiritual journey are unclear.

Programs provide a clear, concrete vehicle to accomplish goals or to reach desired end results. Congregational members want plain, practical, and helpful activities of which they can be a part. Programs serve this role for many people.

Excellent, effective, and targeted programs attract people to a congregation. A first-class preschool program attracts families with young children. Youth look for a congregation with a dynamic program that appeals to their senses.

Single adults often move from congregation to congregation in search of a meaningful program that targets their needs and desires. A project or ministry that has a place in which they can be involved in meaningful learning and service may attract community residents.

Training or leadership development programs equip disciples to serve in various places of Kingdom responsibility. They provide the motivation and skills necessary for effective service, and teach disciples that their spiritual gifts are useful in Kingdom work.

## **What is the Difference Between Programs and Relationships?**

The end result differentiates programs and relationships. If the desired result is the ministry, activity, service or training itself, then these elements act like the programs factor. Programs carried out in this manner can become the desired end result or goal themselves. The successes of the programs become the measurement of success for the congregation.

However, programs operated with a dynamic, flexible, process-orientation might be relationship activities. The desired end result or goal is changed spiritual behavior that should result from the project or activity. The measurement of success is the development of the individual believer or disciple.

Programs are task-oriented and provide stability for a congregation. Relationships activities are people-oriented and empower flexibility within a congregation. Programs are things that congregations do or carry out. Relationships activities are things felt or experienced.

For example, many congregations conduct Sunday School classes or worship experiences. If in the midst of these classes new insight to the Scriptures is discovered, or if God is truly experienced as Lord in worship, then relationships occurs.

They remain programs if the focus of Sunday School and worship is the habit, pattern, or doing what is culturally acceptable in a particular congregation.

When congregations focus on the vision of God that is shared within the fellowship of a local congregation, then the emphasis given to programs moves to an emphasis on people. Therefore, programs that are dynamic, flexible, and fuel the relationships process will also fuel the future direction of the congregation.

When congregations focus on management, the emphasis moves from relationships to an emphasis on maintaining programs. Congregations that are growing younger as the body of Christ will focus on vision and relationships. Congregations growing older as the body of Christ tend to focus on programs and management.

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# Turning Program Events Into Relationship Experiences

## Background

**Program events** are the functional attempts to provide projects, ministries, services, activities, and training for people related to the congregation by membership, fellowship, or through **relationship experiences**.

**Program events** require planning, scheduling, budgeting, leadership recruitment, materials and equipment resources, implementation, and evaluation.

The **program events** aspect of the congregational life cycle represents the specific projects, ministries, services, activities, and training characteristics of a congregation. While primarily focused on the membership of the congregation, they may also relate to programmatic attempts to provide services and ministries to the various communities, publics, target groups, and clients served by the congregation.

Projects, ministries, services, activities, and training include, but are not limited to worship, music, education and training, and weekday and community ministries. **Program events** are focused on bringing new external resources into the congregation. They are task-oriented. Specific, concrete projects that the congregation engages in, such as building programs, are examples of projects that fit the broader category of **program events**.

**Relationship experiences** are the spiritual and relational processes by which persons are brought to faith in God through Jesus Christ, become involved in a local New Testament congregation, are assimilated into the fellowship life and care ministry of a congregation, have opportunities for spiritual growth and leadership development, and are mentored to use their gifts and skills through Kingdom involvement.

For simplicity, **relationship experiences** can be understood as the discipling process in a local congregation. It is the process or spiritual journey by which persons are discipled into fully devoted followers of Christ.

**Relationship experiences** can be thought of in five phases. Although these phases are presented in a linear format, discipling or the **relationship experiences** are flexible and intuitive, and do not necessarily follow a sequential pattern. Various phases can be going on concurrently.

**Relationship experiences** at their best focus on the discipleship journey of each person. They are solution-oriented as opposed to offering a program fix or response to a person's need for spiritual growth and deepening relationships.

**Relationship experiences** as presented here are focused on necessary congregational actions, and not the actions of individual believers. Therefore, put on your congregational systems thinking hat as these phases are considered.

The five phases of **relationship experiences** are Evangelism and New Member Recruitment; Entry and Initial Assimilation; Fellowship, Care Ministry, and Full Assimilation; Spiritual Growth and Leadership Development; and, Kingdom Involvement and Missional Life Style.

## What is the Difference Between Program Events and Relationship Experiences?

The end result differentiates **program events** and **relationship experiences**. If the desired result is the project, ministry, activity, service or training itself, then these elements act like the **program events**. **Program events** carried out in this manner can become the desired end result or goal themselves. The successes of the **program events** become the measurement of success for congregation.

However, **program events** operated with a dynamic, flexible, process-orientation might be **relationship experiences**. The desired end result or goal is changed spiritual behavior that should result from the project or activity. The measurement of success is the development of the individual believer or disciple.

**Program events** are task-oriented and provide stability for a congregation. **Relationship experiences** are people-oriented and empower flexibility within a congregation. **Program events** are things that congregations do or carry out. **Relationship experiences** are things felt or experienced.

For example, many congregations conduct Sunday School classes or worship experiences. If in the midst of these classes new insights to the Scriptures are experienced, or if God is truly encountered as Lord in worship, then these are **relationship experiences**.

They remain **program events** if the focus of Sunday School and worship is the habit, pattern, or doing what is culturally acceptable in a particular congregation.

### **Why Should Congregations Seek to Turn Program Events Into Relationship Experiences?**

Long-term congregational vitality and effectiveness is dependent on their ability to focus on creating and nurturing **relationship experiences** rather than **program events**.

Does that mean that congregations should eliminate their **program events**? No! **Program events** are a necessary and crucial part of the organizing principles of congregations. Every congregation needs a strategy, structure, and system of **program events**.

What it means is that congregations must have **program events** and **relationship experiences** in proper alignment with one another. The purpose of **program events** should be to enable genuine **relationship experiences** to take place in the lives of individuals, in groups within the congregation, and in the congregation as a whole.

When congregations focus on the **vision** of God that is shared within the fellowship of a local congregation, then the emphasis given to **program events** moves to an emphasis on people. Therefore, **program events** that are dynamic, flexible, and fuel the **relationship experiences** will also fuel the future direction of the congregation.

When congregations focus on **management**, the emphasis on **relationship experiences** moves to an emphasis on maintaining **program events**. Congregations who focus on maintaining **program events** will have difficulty sustaining a broad-based ownership of God's **vision** for the congregation.

Congregations that are growing younger as a representation of the body of Christ tend to focus on **vision** and **relationships**. If congregations are growing older, they tend to focus on **programs** and **management**.

[Note: Age here does not refer to the average age of the membership or attenders. It refers to the congregation as a body. There may be some implications for the average age of members or attenders, but that is not the focus of what I am trying to say here.]

## How Can Congregations Turn Program Events Into Relationship Experiences?

Congregations need to be mindful of their starting point when building their system of **program events** and **relationship experiences**. The appropriate starting point is their current understanding of God's spiritual, strategic direction for the congregation that may be represented by the concept of **vision**.

**Vision** should fuel the forward progress of the congregation. Therefore, initial decisions about **relationship experiences** and **program activities** should be made based their ability to help the congregation fulfill its God-given **vision**.

Second, decisions about the type of **relationship experiences** needed should be made before decisions about the type of **program events** to conduct. Another way of saying this is that congregations should determine the characteristics of the disciplemaking process they feel ought to characterize their congregation before determining the projects, ministries, activities, and training they need to conduct.

Too many congregations use the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century denominationally inspired congregational model that looks at **program events** first and then seeks to efficiently carry out the various programs in the hope that **relationship experiences** will result.

Some congregations have realized that the desired end result is not to have a programmatically successful congregation, but to have a congregation that successfully deals with the hurts and hopes of people by offering spiritual solutions, and a nurturing and challenging community.

Third, congregations should build their system of **relationship experiences**. Numerous models exist for doing this. The five phases that **relationship experiences** should include are a generic starting point. Congregations need to see the five phases as an integrated system. They need to be clear about how their Evangelism and Outreach fit with their Entry and Initial Assimilation phase, and incorporate their Fellowship, Care Ministry, and Full Assimilation phase, and so forth.

Ultimately congregations are seeking to turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ, and their systems should reflect this movement.

Fourth, necessary **program events** are then established that support and provide a programmatic infrastructure for the **relationship experiences**. Ongoing **program events** are a very important part of congregational life. **Relationship events** are the *software* of congregational life. **Program events** are the *hardware*. Both are needed.

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## Congregational Management

The primary role of management is to provide the systems and structures that work in an integrative pattern to undergird the fulfillment of vision, and the implementation of relationships and programs.

Vision is the current understanding of God's strategic spiritual direction for a congregation that is cast by leadership and owned by membership.

Relationships are the spiritual and relational process by which persons are brought to faith in God through Jesus Christ, become connected to a local New Testament congregation, are assimilated into the fellowship life and care ministry of a congregation, have opportunities for spiritual growth and leadership development, and are mentored to use their gifts and skills through Kingdom involvement.

Programs are the functional attempts to provide projects, ministries, services, activities, and training for people related to the congregation by membership, fellowship, or through relationship processes.

## **What is Congregational Management?**

Management is the administration of the various resources of the congregation, the formal and informal governance and decision-making structure of the congregation, the formal and informal traditions and culture of the congregation, and the readiness of the congregation for change and growth.

Management also relates to how congregations handle their day-to-day operations. This includes its operational planning process, and how this is implemented to bring about growth and change in the congregation. This factor provides a basis for deciding how the people, financial, facilities, and equipment and materials resources of the congregation are utilized.

Finally, management deals with the efficiency of a congregation. Once a congregation attains the stage of Maturity on the life cycle, its progress tends to be fueled by management rather than vision. During Maturity, Empty Nest, and early Retirement these management principles become increasingly controlling. By late Retirement these management principles begin to break down.

## **What are the Key Elements of Management?**

**Resources:** The resources of a congregation are people and things. People include the pastor, staff, and lay leadership. Thus management will relate to the process of calling a pastor or other staff ministers. The infrastructure that mobilizes laity is addressed here. Lay mobilization as a movement is part of relationships.

Things include the finances, the facilities, the equipment and various materials. These things are not intended to be in a lead role in the life of a congregation. They are intended to be resources that help the congregation fulfill its vision by empowering relationships. Many congregations have this reversed.

**Governance:** Governance relates to the administration and decision-making structure of the congregation. This includes the formal committees, councils, and boards, as well as the process for making decisions.

Governance and decision-making is intended to help guide or navigate the congregational processes, and to continually develop ownership within the congregation. Some congregations mistake governance and decision-making as the manner by which they are to control the congregation.

**Tradition and Culture:** Management may seem like an odd place for tradition and culture. In reality they are commodities that congregations deposit like financial assets in a bank. Their tendency is to maintain more than it is to empower. Some congregations add elements of tradition and culture to the list of core values of the congregation, and overload core values with things that are really negotiable.

**Readiness for Change and Transition:** When management is handled in a flexible, supportive way, it helps congregations to be prepared for the new innovation or the new sense of God's movement. When management is used to control, it shuts down the readiness for change and transition in favor of maintaining the tradition and culture of the congregation. This is because change, even when for the better, is seen as loss.

**Operations:** Operations describes the day-to-day operations of the congregation. Operations should be first of all effective, and then efficient in support of the future of the congregation. Efficiency often dominates effectiveness.

## **What is the Role of Management in the Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development?**

Management is present during the growth side of the life cycle, and helps organize the various stages, but is not fully developed until Adulthood. On the aging side of the life cycle it leads or fuels the process. This begins with Maturity when the vision of the congregation is no longer dominant.

Management is empowering when it is in a support role, and controlling when it is in a lead role. In its lead and controlling role it keeps congregations from redeveloping because they prefer to manage the resources they have rather than taking risks to acquire new and different resources.

It is important for congregations to see that the role of management must diminish, or unfreeze, during a change and transition process that is being attempted on the aging side of the life cycle. The controlling aspects of management, which include the tendency to keep things as they have been, will need to loosen for a congregation to try new patterns, create new energy, from which a new vision can emerge.

## **What is the Difference Between Management and Vision?**

Vision fuels the birth and growth side of the life cycle and stages of development of a congregation. Management is present in these early stages, but not expressed in a fully developed form.

When a congregation reaches Adulthood both vision and management are dominant. Vision is near the completion of its journey, and management is still gaining strength. The vision journey is characterized by a high amount of flexibility until near the end of its journey. Management is characterized by increasing controllability until the Retirement stage when controllability begins to break down.

Once congregations reach the aging side of the life cycle they are being sustained by their management rather than fueled by their vision. At a time when congregations should be seeking to develop new vision as the next step or solution to their current situation, they instead redouble their efforts in management.

Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser in their book, *Managing the Congregation*, share these words about the management response on the aging side of the life cycle:

Religious organizations have “focused tightly on organizational structures as the source of their major problems. So when congregations get into trouble they almost always seek to apply structural remedies; i.e., firing the pastor, cutting the budget, excommunicating a few members, rewriting the church constitution and by-laws, or moving from a bicameral board system to a unicameral board.” [p. 136]

Shawchuck and Heuser feel that the appropriate response to management is to address the congregational belief systems and then deal with the organizational structure to align it with the belief system. This conforms to the idea of dealing with issues related to vision, which include values, vision, and belief systems.

For more information on this subject or to inquire about conference, consultation, or coaching assistance for your congregation or denominational organization, contact George Bullard, Hollifield Leadership Center and Lake Hickory Learning Communities, 6692 Valwood Road, Conover, NC 28613-8759, Voice: 828-256-2126, Fax: 828-256-4989, E-mail: BullardJournal@cs.com.

## **Managing the Congregation**



*Managing the Congregation: Building Effective Systems to Serve People.* By Norman Shawchuck and Roger Heuser. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996. 387 pages. To review this book visit your local book store, or contact Abingdon Press, PO Box 801, 201 Eighth Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37202-0801.

## **Introduction**

Norman Shawchuck has teamed with one or more co-authors to produce some very useful books on congregational life. Other books deal with marketing, quality benchmarks, and leadership.

This book effectively addresses issues related to congregational management. It begins by introducing the reader to the concept of the manager.

## **The Manager**

Management is an all-consuming set of tasks. It is never finished. It creates personal and professional conflicts that even the manager of a religious organization cannot avoid.

A manager is a steward of the congregational resources. As such, a manager is accountable to God for good stewardship and servanthood.

To be effective, a manager must be in touch with his spirituality. Surrender to God must be the manager's first responsibility. Management of congregational systems is his second.

## **The Congregation and Its Environment**

Congregations must continually respond to their environment. Those who resist changes in the environment may not exist in the year 2050.

Congregations must also be clear on their mission within their context or environment. Mission and environment connect the needs of the environment with the ministry of the congregation in order to address needs from a spiritual perspective.

## **The Congregation's Energy Source**

A strategic spiritual vision gives energy to a congregation. Spirituality is the foundation from which vision germinates.

Vision exists in many places within a congregational family. The vision of the pastor and leaders, however, plays a crucial initiating role.

The spirit or morale of a congregation is also a crucial element. This spirit must be energizing for the vision to be clear and successfully fulfilled.

## **Designing the Congregation as System**

Healthy congregational systems require design work on the structures and the belief systems. Such systems will align elements to focus energies toward results.

The design of congregational systems is an indicator of the results truly being sought. Systems produce what they are designed to produce, and not what they hope to produce.

Many religious organizations are designed as bureaucracies with a paternalistic belief system. They should be designed as partnerships with a belief system of stewardship.

## **The Congregation's Relationships**

“It is the religious manager's task to provide a climate that enables people to work freely, responsibly, effectively, and joyfully with others. This is one of the greatest gifts a manager offers a congregation.” [p. 205]

In relationships congregations need to move toward being a community. Specific skills that help move toward community are listening, being a companion, loving, and being oneself. [p. 229]

Relationships also involve power. Proper use of power is empowering to others. Improper use is controlling.

When power is controlling, or dysfunctional, it results in unhealthy conflict. Conflict can erupt over values and traditions, purposes and goals, or programs and methods. [p. 269]

## **The Learning Congregation**

Congregations need to learn or be tutored through feedback from the operations or outputs of their system.

“This information indicates the health of the organization through the reactions of its members, users, and environment to the congregation's actions and attitudes.” [p. 339]

Feedback on how a congregation serves can result in continuous improvement. The lifelong learning generated by feedback must be part of the spirit of a congregation.

## **Implications for Congregations**

1. Often congregations have difficulty understanding the difference between leadership and management. They, like many businesses, are over managed and under led. Management is an essential function in congregations. It must be molded by the strategic spiritual direction of the congregation.
2. Management, and the role of managers, may not be seen as needing a spiritual component in many congregations. Actually it is essential that those serving as managers know that their first responsibility is to surrender to God
3. Congregations need to be open to change, overall. They need to be specifically open to change as environmental or contextual changes affect it.
4. A strategic spiritual vision is a crucial driving force in a congregation. When it is not present and clearly embraced by the congregation, management becomes a controlling force.

5. A positive morale is an essential source of energy for congregations. Often dysfunctional relationships damage morale. Too many times members and regular attenders feel that winning is more important than the good of the congregation.
6. Good design work regarding their programs and governance systems must take place in congregations. An excellent time to address this is when congregations are thinking about the design of a new building.
7. Congregations must be open to constant feedback from members, regular attenders, occasional visitors, and other prospects. This is a vital part of being a lifelong learning organization.

## **Implications for Congregational Champions**

1. Often denominational organizations are manager dominant. They seek to sustain the current practices rather than to be open to a management process that enables leadership to fulfill its vision.
2. The spiritual focus of management activities of congregational champion organizations should be to empower congregations to do the front line work of the Kingdom.
3. Congregational champions must be a constant source of inspiration for congregations, helping them respond to changes in their environment or context. Champions can share data, and offer change models that are effective.
4. Quite often congregations and congregational leaders are in despair about their situation. Champions can encourage an ongoing journey to connect with the energy sources of vision and morale.
5. Unfortunately, one of the great growth industries for congregational champions is change and conflict management. Too many congregations do not have secure leadership management systems that will enable them to work through change and conflict without outside help.
6. Congregational champions need to offer good models and processes for congregational design. Often congregations organize to plateau or be passive when they follow models or design suggested by their denomination.
7. Lifelong learning is the lifeblood of denominations, and congregational champion organizations. Congregations need information and knowledge that they can turn into wise actions.

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## **Diminishing the Controlling Aspects of Management**

### **Overview**

A crucial early step in the process of congregational redevelopment during Maturity, Empty Nest, Retirement, and Old Age is to diminish the controlling aspects of the management processes in the congregation.

Management is the administration of the various resources of the congregation, the formal and informal governance and decision-making structure of the congregation, the formal and informal traditions and culture of the congregation, and the readiness of the congregation for change and growth.

Management also relates to how congregations handle their day-to-day operations. This includes its operational planning process, and how this is implemented to bring about growth and change in the congregation. This factor provides a basis for deciding how the people, financial, facilities, and equipment and materials resources of the congregation are utilized.

Finally, management deals with the efficiency of a congregation. Once a congregation attains the stage of Maturity on the life cycle, its progress tends to be fueled by management rather than vision. During Maturity, Empty Nest, and early Retirement these management principles become increasingly controlling. By late Retirement the management principles begin to break down.

The specific management groups differ according to the doctrine, polity, or discipline of a particular denominational tradition. However, management groups can at times be known by such names as elders, deacons, boards, council, finance, nominating, personnel, trustees, and other names.

## **How Management Becomes Controlling**

When a congregation is born, flexibility and creativity is high, and controllability is low. As a congregation develops and establishes its patterns of relating, flexibility and creativity begin to decrease, and controllability begins to increase.

Management becomes controlling in a congregation by the end of the first generation of its existence when vision becomes diminished. When this happens, management begins to fuel the forward progress on the congregation. Management steps into the vacuum created by the lack of an empowering and fueling vision.

Management is empowering when it is in a support role and controlling when it is in a lead role. In its lead and controlling role it keeps congregations from redeveloping because they prefer to manage the resources they have rather than taking risks to acquire new and different resources.

It is important for congregations to see that the role of management must diminish or unfreeze during a change and transition process that is being attempted on the aging side of the life cycle. The controlling aspects of management, which include the tendency to keep things as they have been, will need to diminish for a congregation to try new patterns or new energy from which a new vision can emerge.

## **Creating an Urgency to Diminish Management**

At least three ways exist to create an urgency to diminish management. **First**, is to define the reality of the controlling aspects of management. **Second**, is to build broad-based ownership around the new understanding of God's vision that is emerging in the congregation. **Third**, is to use a crisis as an opportunity to look at all the systems of the congregation and reorganize around those that empower rather than those that control.

To define the reality of the controlling aspects of management, take some measurements. One tendency of congregations is to, over time, add decision-making and policy-development groups to the mixture of the leadership and management of the congregation.

Take a measurement of the number of official management groups that existed in the congregation ten years ago, and the number that exist today. In the typical congregation this number grows over time, and also becomes a larger percentage of the official groups of any kind in the congregation that require recruitment of leadership each year.

Often the number of official management groups in a congregation will increase even when the membership, attendance, and the number of people otherwise connected with the congregation are plateaued or declining.

A second tendency of congregations is to place on official management groups the same people for multiple terms of service. Over time this may result in management groups being made up of persons who are older than the average member of the congregation, and who have longer tenure of membership than the average member.

Take a measurement of the number of people who were in various management positions ten years ago, and are in the same or similar management positions today.

This second tendency leads to decisions and policies that seek to sustain the past, with insufficient regard to the new things that God is doing in the congregation. Appropriate attachment to the heritage of the congregation is a good thing. Holding on to the past when doing so may keep a congregation from reaching its potential is a bad thing.

When this second tendency fully develops, some official or unofficial group within the congregation begins to act like an executive committee for the congregation and takes control of day-to-day decisions. Generally, the motives of this group are good. Their desire is to help the congregation succeed if it is a strong congregation, or survive if it is a weak congregation.

A third tendency of congregations is to add steps to the decision-making and policy-development procedures or process. What used to be able to be taken directly to the final decision-making group—council, board, or congregation—now must go through several steps of review.

This is not to suggest that accountability is a negative thing, but to suggest that unnecessary review slows decision-making, and discourages change and transition that might keep a congregation flexible and responsive to new opportunities.

Creating an urgency to diminish management may also result from strong, positive focus on the new God-given vision that is emerging within a congregation. A broad-based group of people may feel new passion for Kingdom concerns, and realize that management practices may need to be set aside or relaxed for a while to allow a new Kingdom movement to develop within the congregation.

This is certainly the ideal way for flexibility to again replace controllability as the lead characteristic or mood within the congregation. It definitely avoids what may become unhealthy confrontations between leadership and management when the controlling aspects of management are addressed.

At times, a major crisis in the congregation that threatens its future existence causes the congregation to reinvent itself. This may involve reengineering the management structure to make it leaner. Such action is generally a good byproduct of a crisis. It may allow a congregation to make Kingdom progress quicker and more effectively.

## **Tactics to Use to Diminish Management**

Existing management groups can diminish their controlling tendencies by asking a different set of questions about management decisions and processes than might be their traditional pattern. Some of these new questions are as follows:

1. What decisions can we make that will empower the vision and help create relationship experiences in our congregation?
2. How can we make this decision in a way that will include more people in the life and ministry of the congregation, and encourage their spiritual development as disciples?
3. How do we both honor the past and the present obligations of the congregation, and display a genuine openness to new traditions that may need to be formed that will help us to be relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
4. Why do we need this additional step or area of accountability? Will it help the congregation be more flexible or more controllable?
5. What seems impossible today, that if it could happen, would transform the congregation's ability to serve in the midst of God's Kingdom?

Another tactic that can be used is to decrease the number of decision-making and policy-development groups in the life of the congregation. Retain only the management groups that are essential to maintaining organizational accountability and effectiveness.

Reengineering the decision-making and policy-development process to take out unnecessary and redundant steps is another tactic. Ask which steps matter to people connected with the congregation, and which steps help the congregation to better fulfill its Kingdom vision.

An additional helpful tactic is to reduce the number of people it takes to fill the various decision-making and policy-development groups in the congregation. Some congregations are unbalanced to the point that more people are involved in management activities than are involved in ministry activities.

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## **Creating Enduring World-Class Clergy and Laity Teams in Congregations**

### **Overview**

If people are searching for community and not committee, then why do congregations continue to add committees to their leadership structure? It is because congregations are still focusing on accountable management and programmatic events that long-term lead to aging congregations.

A work teams approach has the possibility of empowering visionary leadership and relationship experiences that are necessary for congregations to have a satisfying bonding and relationship among pastor, congregation, and God's vision.

Coming together is the creating of community; staying together is a journey; and being in effective ministry together long-term as a work team fuels Kingdom progress.

Increasingly pastors and congregational leaders are being called on to achieve higher levels of performance. Doing this in old command and control hierarchical systems is difficult to impossible. To address these demands, congregations today are beginning to move toward new, formal structures where cross-functional work teams replace the traditional hierarchical organization.

This move to formal work team patterns should be treated as a major change in congregational culture. Too often congregational leaders and managers do not understand that culture does not take care of itself. It must have senior pastor and key, core layperson level support.

The transition from the traditional congregation, characterized by hierarchy, and command and control, to one based on work teams is a long, difficult journey. Here are some implications for congregations of this culture change.

### **Implications of Creating World-Class Teams in Congregations**

- 1.** Boards, councils, and committees are waning as the key governance designations in congregations. Teams and communities are emerging. This does not mean less accountability; it means more empowerment.
- 2.** The movement to teams should not be seen as an accommodation to culture, although it is congruent with postmodern culture. Rather, it should be seen as an affirmation of a New Testament that embraces the theology of the Trinity, and the organization of the early church as communities of faith.
- 3.** Team is not a shallow or easy concept to embrace. It involves seven attributes that must be nurtured as a team-based culture is developed. At first, team-based ministry can call for more meetings rather than less. Long-term, it is the way to empower multiple things to happen simultaneously without the need to control them.
- 4.** Some laypersons, particularly persons who have been members of the congregation for more than 20 years, may resist a move to team-based ministry. They will feel a loss of accountability, a loss of their position of hierarchical authority in the congregation, and a loss of commitment to the denominational way of structuring a congregation.
- 5.** Make sure that the move to team-based ministry is not just a change in the name of how the congregation has always been governed. Learning experiences for all that are going to be involved in team-based ministry need to be conducted. Remember that it will take several years to change the governance culture of the congregation.

6. Teams should be seen as an effective *on-the-job* learning experience for people newly connected with the congregation. There should be no waiting period before people becoming connected with the congregation can serve with a team.
7. Teams should be given as much permission as possible to act without having to seek further authority or permission. To accomplish this there must be an open and obvious commitment by all teams to the mission, purpose, core values, and vision of the congregation.
8. Congregational life, particularly in new paradigm congregations, will continue to move toward a democratization of spiritual life and congregational governance. Laity will insist on governance structures that allow for the greatest possible spiritual freedom and diversity.
9. Pastors accustomed to a traditional model of congregational governance that gives a lot of authority to the pastor, will have trouble adapting to a team environment. They will not divide their understanding of spiritual authority from their understanding of authority in governance.
10. As an increasing number of laity works in employment environments where cross-functional and self-directed teams enable a high level of performance, they will insist on this increased performance in their congregations.
11. Congregations with a controlling culture will have a difficult time moving to a team-based governance culture. Older members will feel that personal responsibility is being lost, and that the traditional authority of the board is being undermined.
12. Particularly where congregations have been accustomed to policy-making committees, instead of councils and task forces that do actual work, it will be hard to move to teams where everyone is expected to help produce desired end results.
13. Congregations should consider making the move to teams over a period of time, and using teams at first primarily in new areas of ministry and governance, and where many of the participants will be people born after 1955. In fact, a team environment may work best in a newly planted congregation, or a congregation with a new pastor and several new staff persons in top leadership and management roles.
14. Teams are unlikely to be successful unless the leaders and managers of the congregation give their full support. This may require significant training for congregational leaders before the move is made to a team environment. Many leaders and managers born before 1945 will have a difficult time making the adjustment to a team environment. Their own personal patterns will be difficult to change.
15. Congregations need to seek the best leadership in pastor, staff, and laity. They do not need to be afraid to look at young persons and people with a diversity of spiritual gifts. Pastors, staff, and congregational leaders need to be people who have spiritual passion, the ability to articulate a vision and the focus to live the vision.
16. Congregational leaders need to not be threatened by people who are smarter, and have different skills and thinking styles. Leaders who are threatened cannot lead the congregation to its full potential.
17. Congregations need to be more open to taking risks and to experimentation in ministry. Too many congregations are not organized for genius. They are organized for mediocrity.



**18.** For great congregational teams to exist, leaders must empower, not control. They must share, not hoard information. They must nurture, not dominate. It is risky business from the perspective of a command and control structure. It is necessary business if the goal is to reach the full Kingdom potential.

**19.** Great congregational leaders nurture their congregations to become a community of fully devoted followers of Christ. Along the way they bring together people called to do Kingdom work and empower them to fulfill their vision for Kingdom growth.

**20.** Great congregational leaders and great congregational teams embrace the challenge of newly emerging technologies. They see the potential of new technology, and realize that their next generation of members and regular attenders will be embracing the technology.

### **A Suggested Resource**

An excellent recent resource on the team-based congregation is the book, *Leading a Team-Based Church*, by George Cladis. [San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999]

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## Does Your Congregation Have an Executive Committee It Did Not Appoint or Elect?

### Overview

Does your congregation have an executive committee that it did not appoint or elect? I don't mean your Deacons, Elders, Council, or Board; I mean an executive committee. If you aren't sure, then either you do not have one, or you do not recognize the one you have.

What is an executive committee? An executive committee is a formal or informal group in a congregation who appear to be the permission givers or those with veto power for decisions made in the congregation. They have co-opted this role. No one appointed them or elected them.

My observation is that in smaller membership congregations and mega membership congregations this tends to be an informal group. In mid-size, large, and regional congregations this tends to be a formal group. However, a wild card is that in congregations more than 30 to 35 years old this can be an informal group of founding members who see themselves as trustees of the founding purpose of the congregation.

Executive committees can be formal or informal groups in a congregation that deal with personnel issues, lay appointment or nominating processes, or financial, stewardship, or trustee issues.

In many congregations the self-appointed executive committee is a small group of people who handle the financial policies and management of the congregation. In the organizing principles system of a congregation they represent the management factor rather than the leadership factor.

Their goal is sound management practices within the congregation. Often their intentions are good. They want to be sure that the congregation has sound fiscal policies. At the same time, their practices are controlling rather than empowering.

They fail to realize that by controlling the financial aspects of the congregation, they probably hurt the income flow into the congregation. However, they feel it is important to control in a conservative fiscal fashion, the spending patterns of the pastor, staff, and accountable lay people.

Let's take debt as one example of how this plays itself out. To an executive committee with financial responsibilities, debt represents potential of death at the door. They can see the congregation closing, forfeiting its financial reputation, or they themselves losing respect in the community if the congregation cannot pay its debt.

Therefore, paying the debt becomes their primary priority. They may go so far as to say that there are two financial priorities in the congregation: paying the debt, and everything else. Everything else includes pastor and staff salaries; programs, ministries, and activities; and, missions and outreach.

Generally the first control action is a significant cut in missions and outreach. Cutting missions and outreach is a huge symbolic action with real impact on the core ideology of the congregation. Second, cuts are made in programs, ministries, and activities. The last area cut is pastor and staff salaries, although cutting the salaries may be a reality by first failing to provide adequate salary increases.

These actions can communicate several messages that may be more negative than positive. **First**, they can communicate that paying off debt is more important than fulfilling the mission of a New Testament congregation. **Second**, they can communicate that the congregation is primarily a business, and only secondarily a faith community.

**Third**, they may show a distinct difference in the spiritual worldview of those executive committee folks, and those folks who cast vision. **Fourth**, they may show a lack of unity of vision within the congregation. **Fifth**, they may show a lack of common language and concepts within the congregation. This is a common challenge; that is, to get a common language about which we can talk.

When the controlling aspects of the executive committee set in, then every decision that directly or indirectly affects areas in which they feel they have authority must have their approval. It becomes a written or unwritten law in the congregation that certain things need the approval of this group. Obtaining this approval can be tough when the group is informal, not clearly identified, and not visible within the congregational life.

### **Examples of Executive Committees**

Over the years I have seen numerous examples of self-appointed congregational executive committees. One was a group of trustees in a congregation that was approximately 30 years old. These five men felt that it was their legal responsibility to maintain the fiscal integrity of the congregation without seeking any congregational approval for their actions.

After all, they had been appointed the trustees of the congregation 30 years earlier by a judge when the congregation was chartered in their state. They felt they had a legal responsibility to the laws of their state, and a spiritual responsibility to God to protect the assets of their faith community.

During a certain period of the congregation's life they felt that the fiscal integrity of the congregation was being threatened by the lack of growth in the congregation that was sufficient to service their building debt. In their opinion the primary cause of their lack of growth was the inability of their current pastor to attract new members and retain their existing members in active participation. Attendance was going down rather than up.

Feeling it was their personal responsibility and obligation to deal with their situation, they took actions to seek to negotiate the early retirement of their pastor. This included seeking to negotiate with their denomination's pension board the necessary arrangements to execute his retirement.

However, they forgot to discuss their actions with the pastor, or any of the other leaders of their congregation. Why should they? They felt they were not accountable to the congregation, but were accountable to the judge who appointed them, and to God who chose them for this task.

Another example is an informal lay leadership group in a mega congregation. This group was made up of selected members of the congregation's trustees, finance committee, and personnel committee.

This group would meet at least once per month to determine the next steps the congregation needed to take to manage a multi-million dollar construction and renovation project, and to bring better day-to-day management to the business affairs of the congregation.

One of their secondary goals was how to manage all of this in a way that would keep the pastor and church staff from messing up their plans, and costing the congregation money and time. They particularly felt that the pastor's management of the congregation was totally ineffective. At the same time, they felt that his ability to attract new people into the congregation through his relationship skills was the long-term salvation of the congregation's financial challenges.

They also felt that it was important to keep their work secret so that the congregation at-large would not know how bad the congregational management systems were being handled by the staff. This model had been successful for them in many community business and political endeavors, so they felt it would be successful here also.

The man who ran the figures for the group was not an official member of either of the committees of the congregation. He had been in the past, but had retired from active congregational involvement except for his participation with this group. He attended weekend worship services of the congregation less than half of the Sundays each year.

### **What is the Impact of Self-Appointed Executive Committees?**

**The Good News:** **1.** Self-appointed executive committees are at times able to help congregations to successfully navigate crucial times of financial and management threat and challenge. **2.** The motives of self-appointed executive committees are generally positive and helpful. Their existence shows that there are people who have passion for the stability of the congregation.

**3.** Often these people are skilled at dealing with complex decision-making, have excellent community and business contacts, and bring resources and expertise to bear on congregational opportunities and challenges that may not otherwise be available to the congregation.

**The Bad News:** **1.** Whatever self-appointed executive committees touch, they tend to control. **2.** The motives of self-appointed executive committees can modulate to become ones of keeping the congregation from being what the committee does not want it to be.

**3.** Seldom would self-appointed executive committees be accused of being highly spiritual. As such they may oppose a new movement of God in the congregation because it does not fit their management paradigm. **4.** If a congregation needs flexibility and creativity to respond to new opportunities, such as the opportunity to redevelop as a congregation, any informal control group is a stumbling block to this effort.

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# How Well Does Your Congregational Budget Support a Balanced Kingdom Ministry?

## Overview

The budget of a congregation reveals a great deal about its priorities. It states the things for which it has spiritual passion. It demonstrates the level of support for both Kingdom ministry and institutional maintenance.

The vast majority of congregations use a budget as a projected plan of spending for a given year. Generally the undesignated tithes and offerings from the people connected with the congregation fund the budget. The question for today is, *how well does your congregational budget support a balanced Kingdom ministry?*

That depends on several things. **First**, what is your definition of financial support for balanced Kingdom ministry? **Second**, what are the categories or characteristics of a budget that supports a balanced Kingdom ministry? **Third**, what are the unique needs of your congregation that will impact the annual percentage and dollar distribution?

## Categories

Let's focus on categories. About twenty years ago I began working with some spending categories for congregational budgets. I have four that I have stuck with, although I have modified the definition of these categories as I add to the collection of congregations I have observed and coached. Here are my current definitions for the four categories:

**Category One—Missions, Evangelism, and New Member Recruitment:** This category covers what the congregation does in three areas. **First**, what does it do to fulfill the Great Commission in the spirit of the Great Commandment that extends beyond its local setting? What does it do to support missions locally, nationally, and globally that may not directly result in new people connecting with their congregation?

**Second**, what does it do intentionally to invite others to eternal life through a personal faith encounter with God through Jesus Christ? What evangelism activities does it fund? **Third**, what intentional personal or marketing efforts does it engage in that seek to recruit new people to connect with this congregation? Often category one is third of four categories in terms of the amount of budget dollars.

**Category Two—Discipleship, Programs, Ministries, and Activities:** This category covers what the congregation does to assimilate new people into the full fellowship and care life of the congregation, to help people to grow spiritually, to develop leadership, and to help individuals be on mission in response to their spiritual gifts, skills, and will.

In addition, this category covers the programs, ministries, and activities planned for various age and target groups from birth through death, and worship, discipleship, and community building activities. More times than not, this is the smallest category in terms of the budget dollars committed to it.

**Category Three—Personnel:** This category covers all direct and indirect costs of personnel. This includes the pastor, any staff ministers, support staff, and service staff. For many congregations, this will be their largest category in terms of the budget dollars committed to it.

**Category Four—Facilities and Administration Costs:** This category covers all direct and indirect costs related to buildings and property. Second, it includes the cost of office supplies, equipment, technology, and services. Usually this is the second largest category in terms of budget dollars.

## **Prioritizing These Categories**

**Ideal Congregation:** In an ideal congregation, in an ideal world, prioritizing these categories would be simple. The starting place I would use is to assign 25 percent of the budget to each of these categories. What type of congregation would result from this funding priority?

**First,** it would be a congregation that has a high commitment to missions, evangelism, and new member recruitment. It would be spending twice as much as I typically see for this category. It would be an outwardly focused congregation rather than an inwardly focused congregation.

**Second,** it would place a high commitment on helping people who connect with the congregation to be on a personal spiritual, faith journey toward mature discipleship that results in Kingdom service. As a result, its financial stewardship would probably be much higher than the typical congregation. Therefore, funding a challenging budget and keeping the categories balanced would be easy for them.

It would place a high priority on programs for various age and target groups. It would probably be well known for high quality programming in one or more areas—depending on the size of the congregation.

**Third,** it would have only the essential staff necessary to operate the congregation. It would be high on lay mobilization rather than being staff-driven. Other than the pastor, most or all of the staff may be part-time or bivocational.

**Fourth,** its facilities would be as multi-purpose as possible. They would not be large in comparison to many congregations, but they will be high quality and versatile. The budget would not have to handle much debt because of the high level of financial stewardship represented by the people connected with the congregation.

**Strangulated Congregation:** At the other extreme, in a congregation which is strangulated by its budget priorities, 10 percent or less goes to missions, evangelism, and new member recruitment, 10 percent or less goes to discipleship and programs, 50 percent or more is allocated to personnel, and 30 percent or more is used for facilities and administrative costs.

This is an inwardly focused congregation with little commitment to Kingdom growth. It may have many helpful discipleship activities and programs, but they are inadequately funded and must depend on significant fees from participants.

Leadership is staff-driven, and lay mobilization is passive. The buildings and property take up a large percent of the budget. Lackluster financial stewardship results in congregational debt being paid out of the budget rather than through over-and-above designated giving.

## **Balanced Kingdom Ministry Congregational Budgets**

Between the extremes of the ideal congregation and the strangulated congregation is a realistic goal for balanced Kingdom ministry congregational budgets. To achieve this status it is probably necessary to establish ranges for the four categories that take into account various sizes, settings, and overall situations that congregations encounter.

A reasonable range for many congregations would be as follows: Category One—Missions, Evangelism, and New Member Recruitment: 15 percent to 25 percent. Category Two—Discipleship, Programs, Ministries, and

Activities: 10 percent to 20 percent. Category Three—Personnel: 40 percent to 50 percent. Category Four—Facilities and Administration: 20 percent to 30 percent.

What type of congregation could this yield? **First**, this could be a congregation with significant commitment to fulfilling the Great Commission through local, national, and global efforts. It could also commit generous resources to sharing the gospel and helping to connect people to its congregation.

**Second**, it could adequately fund its discipleship efforts, and programs, ministries and activities. High quality could be achieved. To the extent that its discipleship efforts include biblical responsibility to be good stewards of all God-given resources, it probably would have generously given to its budget.

**Third**, it would have a significant number of personnel, but many of these would be part-time ministry mobilizers. It would not over-invest in full-time staff that could tend to make the congregation staff-driven.

**Fourth**, it would have good facilities. Many areas of its facilities could have multiple uses for different programs and age or target groups. Its administration costs would be as lean as possible, and it would have found ways to outsource as much as is feasible.

## A Few Principles

**Principle One:** When the missions, evangelism, and new member recruitment category falls below 15 percent of the budget expenditures, the congregation could turn inward.

**Principle Two:** When the amount spent on discipleship, programs, ministries, and activities falls below 10 percent, the congregation could fail to develop mature disciples. It could also lose the cutting edge on its programs, ministries, and activities, and fail to retain various age and target groups.

**Principle Three:** When personnel costs exceed 50 percent of the expenditures, the congregation could become staff-driven, as a result of failing to build into its core discipleship and programming efforts sufficient emphases on lay mobilization.

**Principle Four:** When facilities and administration costs exceed 30 percent of expenditures, several things could have happened. **First**, the congregation may have overextended in building or buying new facilities. **Second**, the congregation may have inadequately planned for debt retirement. **Third**, the congregation may have become controlled by management instead of being empowered by mission.

**Principle Five:** When the amount spent on personnel, facilities, and administration together exceeds 80 percent of the total budget expenditures, the congregation has probably become financially strangled in its ability to get the mission, vision, and strategy of the congregation accomplished. It may have ceased to be a community of faith, and have become a voluntary, non-profit institution.

For more information on this subject or to inquire about conference, consultation, or coaching assistance for your congregation or denominational organization, contact George Bullard, Hollifield Leadership Center and Lake Hickory Learning Communities, 6692 Valwood Road, Conover, NC 28613-8759, Voice: 828-256-2126, Fax: 828-256-4989, E-mail: BullardJournal@cs.com.