

Church Administration Matters

Best Practices for Boards

Boards and Board Meetings are a fact of church life. For some people this reality is disappointing or even discouraging. But the truth is that a well trained and well used Board can be a tremendous asset to a pastor and the local church. This document contains some practices to make Boards and Board Meetings more efficient. [Clearly this is not an “end-all document”, but hopefully it will be a helpful resource for you.

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HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

I would like to begin this resource by establishing what I believe is the foundation on which everything else should be built upon. The idea is that healthy relationships within the Board promote health in the church.

“It’s all about relationships.”

I think that statement sums up the entirety of the Kingdom of God, including how to be an effective Board.

Trust – I realize that most people believe trust must be earned. In some regards, I’m not positive that is a biblical idea. Trust can, and should be earned, but it can also be extended

by one person to another. Trust is where **all** healthy relationships start. Unless a person has demonstrated a reason **not** to trust them, I try to extend trust to every person. When people trust each other, they have established a basis for working together effectively. Trust almost always involves knowing the person's heart. I have known people who have been suspicious of a person and their motives **until** they get to know the person and the person's heart. Once that happens, I may not always agree with them, but I have confidence that they have a good heart, so I can accept them.

While I've said that trust might not have to be earned, it certainly can and should be built into the lives of those we labor alongside in the Kingdom of God. How can trust be built in Pastor – Board relationships? Here are some ideas on how you can be a trustworthy person – not in any particular order:

- ◆ **Love** – true love involves acceptance and respect for the person (even if you disagree); as you all know, true love is unconditional, true love cares about the other person (kindness and thoughtfulness);
- ◆ **Consistency** – being the same all the time allows others to know what to expect from you;
- ◆ **Affirmation** – the Bible says it a couple of ways. . .give “honor to whom honor is due” (Romans 13: 7); express gratitude and appreciation. . .“building others up according to their needs” (Ephesians 4: 29); speak positive words to people. Giving credit to those who deserve it builds trust in others;
- ◆ **Honesty / Integrity** – when people seeing do the right thing (according the Scripture) it fosters confidence (trust) in who you are;
- ◆ **Transparency** – a noted comedian used to say, “What you see is what you get!” When we're transparent, that's what people will say about us. Part of transparency is admitting faults, shortcoming or errors. . .rather than diminish their respect for us, such an approach will **increase** it. To that end, when you are wrong **apologize well**. . .don't justify an action, simply say, “I was wrong to. . .” and **never** add a “but”; ownership of our own errors builds trust in others;
- ◆ **Communication** – it's been said that communication is 80% of the lifeblood of a marriage. I would agree, but amend that to say it is 80% of any healthy relationship. A good rule of thumb in this area is never let your Board be surprised by “the grapevine” or with public announcements. Use every ounce of your communication skills to have open and clear communication with the Board.

Friendship – it is important for the Pastor and Board to be more than co-laborers. They should be friends who happen to work together for the Kingdom of God. Have times of fellowship where business is not the purpose of being together. Eat a meal together as a Board – do an activity together – laugh together. Have the Board over to your house. I like the title of Ken Davis' short radio spots – “Lighten up. . .and live!” Have fun together with your Board. The same goes for the church staff, including lay leaders.

Disciples Together – the single most important connection that we have with our Boards is that we are brothers and sisters in the Lord. Part of our relationship should be sharing the Word of God together (don't preach **at** them!). Have Board Members share devotions with the

Board. Pray **with** each other **and for** each other. Nothing builds healthy relationships or connects hearts more than praying with each other for our needs and for the Lord's blessing in our lives.

Well, those are some thoughts on building healthy relationships with our Boards. They are obviously not exhaustive and must be tailored to every situation, but I believe they will foster a healthy and strong relationship between a Pastor and the Board.

Now we'll proceed onto some practical ideas of how to make a Board an asset to the Pastor and church rather than a burden and how to make the Board more efficient in fulfilling its responsibilities.

THE ROLE OF THE BOARD

The Word of God indicates that the role of a Deacon is very important to the life and effective ministry of the Church. The appointing of the first Deacon Board was a critical event in the life of the early church. I believe the church was at a crossroads of what ministry would look like and how it would operate at that time and the solution would serve as a model for Christians throughout the ages to follow. The Holy Spirit gave "the Twelve" (Apostles) great insight and wisdom to negotiate this crossroads according to God's design and purpose. The result of this approach was "God's message was preached in ever-widening circles. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too" (**Acts 6: 7**).

It's been said that if a person doesn't understand the design of something they will most likely abuse it. I think that is extremely true about the Church and specifically the Board of Deacons. In my experience, if Board Members don't have a proper understanding of their role they will often become a curse to a pastor rather than the blessing they are intended to be. It is important, then, that Pastors and Deacons – and even the congregation – have a firm understanding of God's **design** for the ministry of a Deacon. They must then be committed to fulfilling that design.

[Let me also point out that the role of a Deacon is a template for the role of the entire leadership team --- Deacons. . .Associate Pastors. . .Ministry Leaders. . .Ministry Team members. Literally everyone in the church can use this template to determine their ministry role in the church.]

For some reason we have changed our church bylaws in the Assemblies of God and have lost a key element to help Deacons understand their role. We used to include the phrase something like – "The Board shall act in an advisory capacity with the Pastor. **It is not a legislative body**, but is for the counsel and mutual assistance in the administration of the business and ministry of the church" (**emphasis mine**). Without clearly stating this truth, it seems to me that we leave the Board open to believe they are in charge, while nothing could be further from the truth.

REPRESENTATIVES – This particular part is more focused on Deacons, but the Biblical philosophy can and does pertain to all leaders – and even just attenders – as well. In most Assembly of God churches, people are selected to be representatives on the Board of Deacons – the method may vary, but there is a selection process. It is crucial for the Deacons to understand **who** they represent and for them to **operate accordingly**.

Some people have the idea that Deacons are representatives of the congregation. [It seems to me that this misconception is derived from our political system. Politicians campaign and are elected to office to represent the people of their state or region.] When Deacons operate from this misconception, they feel they are responsible to the congregation. So the thought is that they should be an advocate for the concerns or interests of congregation members.

This idea can result in an adversarial approach to serving on the Board. I have even seen where it deteriorates to the point where Deacons begin to believe that they are selected to **“fix problems in the church”** or to **“keep the Pastor in line”** or in the worst case, to **“protect the church from the Pastor”**. This approach is not only not Biblical, it is detrimental and even destructive to the life and health of any church body.

The fact is that Deacons **are** representatives --- they are representatives **of God!** While they will field concerns and interests of congregation members and take them into consideration, their role is to take those before the Lord in prayer and be an advocate for the Lord and **His** perspective with the church.

Since this is also the primary role of a Pastor, this establishes the most basic foundation for the relationship of a Pastor and the Board of Deacons.

Deacons are **representatives of God**, and I would take that reality **very seriously!**

FUNCTION – In most Bible-based churches, the Pastor is seen as the God-called leader.

According to the typical Assemblies of God Bylaws, a Board of Deacons serves in an advisory / assistance capacity rather than having a legislative position.

Deacons should feel the need to be partners with their Pastor. A Deacon is to be a help or assistance to the Pastor in fulfilling God’s vision for their particular local church. The Board is chosen by the people to be used by God to assist the Pastor in the ministry of the church.

Acts 6: 1 – 7 helps us understand the division of duties of the Pastor and the Board of Deacons. Let’s look at that for a few moments (**NLT**):

Acts 6: 1 – 4 – “But as the believers rapidly multiplied, there were rumblings of discontent. Those who spoke Greek complained against those who spoke Hebrew, saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve called a meeting of all the believers. “We apostles should spend our time preaching and teaching the word of God, not administering a food program,” they said. “Now look around among yourselves, brothers, and select seven men who are well respected and are full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom. We will put them in charge of this business. Then we can spend our time in prayer and preaching and teaching the word.”

We find some very interesting things in this passage:

- (1) There was a food distribution system in place, but the Greeks felt it was not fair to their widows. This ministry was just happening in the church, the Apostles did not create it nor did they conduct it;
- (2) The people looked to the Apostles to provide wisdom to solve this problem;

- (3) The Apostles declare that it is their role, their responsibility to “spend [their] time in prayer and preaching and teaching the Word” of God. This, then, is the **role** of Pastors;
- (4) In this specific instance, the role of the Deacons (which means “servant”) is to design and operate a food distribution system for the church. This defines the general role of Deacons – to minister to the needs of the people. However, let me make the obvious logical extension of this passage. While the role of the Deacons is specific in this instance, the Apostles define the overall role of Pastors – pray and preach / teach the Word of God. That is their role. The remainder of the ministry in the church is not primarily their role, but rather the role of Associate Pastors, Deacons, Ministry Leaders and Ministry Teams; and
- (5) This role was seen as a **spiritual role** as indicated by the qualifications of those who would serve. They needed to be “well respected and. . .full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom”.

Acts 6: 5, 6 – “This idea pleased the whole group, and they chose the following: Stephen (a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit), Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas of Antioch (a Gentile convert to the Jewish faith, who had now become a Christian). These seven were presented to the apostles, who prayed for them as they laid their hands on them”.

Let me make a couple of observations on this:

- (a) Some have pointed out that the problem was surfaced by the Greek speaking believers and that all of the men chosen to serve have Greek names. It has been pointed out what a wonderful concept the Apostles devised. I would point out to you that the Apostles did no such thing. They asked the people to devise the concept of how to deal with the problem and they demonstrated real Christian love by assigning the positions of authority to the group that was in the minority. That tells me that the Apostles had confidence in the people to create a Godly solution and that the people were mature enough Christians to do just that! It was Spirit-led people who made these decisions.
- (b) The people understood the position of the Apostles, so rather than selecting some men and putting them to work, they brought them to the Apostles. I believe they brought them for two reasons – to have the Apostles affirm the people’s decision (that reflects a proper understanding of spiritual responsibility) and to have the Apostles commission these men to this great work (yet another indication that the people understood this vital work to be of a spiritual nature).

We’ve already talked about the result of the process, where **Acts 6: 7** says, “God’s message was preached in ever-widening circles. The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem, and many of the Jewish priests were converted, too”.

My friends, that tells me that when we operate within God’s design for leadership, the benefits and results are tremendous. . .and supernatural in scope!!!

I’ve said that Deacons should feel the need to be partners with their Pastor. Well, the same should be said of the Pastor – they should feel the need to be partners with their Deacons! Wise is the Pastor who has a dynamic partnership with his / her Board of Deacons. That is one of the keys to spiritual success in the Church of Jesus Christ.

One of these areas is when a Pastor realizes that while God does speak to them, He also confirms that leading through the Board. It is amazing what happens when Deacons understand that their Pastor believes God also speaks through them. It follows that they should be careful in what they say when they know how seriously a Pastor takes their words.

[**CAUTION** --- don't violate the 3rd Commandment!]

I hope you understand and accept how important it is for a Pastor and a Board of Deacons to operate as a Team. There are several lessons we can learn from the concept of a Team:

The Team only has **one leader** – but **only** the whole team can get a victory!

[**Illustration - Abigail and Brittany Hensel** are conjoined twins, born in 1990. Each of the Hensel twins has her own heart and stomach but together they rely on three lungs. They have two legs, an undivided upper torso, and two arms. Each controls the limbs and trunk, and feels sensations, **on her own side exclusively**: if you tickle the ribs on the right, **only** Abby giggles.

Yet the girls manage - no one knows exactly how - to move as one being. They work together to do every day tasks. Although they were told they would never walk, they can walk, run, play sports, swim, and ride a bike. Obviously these girls have much to gain in living in harmony with each other - but then don't we all? Teamwork and unity is a concept they have had to grasp quickly. "When they can't agree on where to go, which is a rare occurrence, they literally **cannot move**." Despite overwhelming obstacles they have shown how important respecting each other's dignity and individuality is without allowing selfishness to override the necessity and beauty of unity.]

The Church Team is lead by the Pastor in the same way that a coach leads a professional sports team. The Board is similar to the assistant coaches / players that work with the coach. The Head Coach / Pastor sets the direction of the team, he provides the game plan to fulfill that direction and he oversees the execution of it. Just as the head coach consults with his assistant coaches, so a Pastor consults with his Board and other leaders in the church.

And in the same way that the buck for the professional sports team stops squarely on the coach's desk, so the buck for a Church stops squarely on the Pastors desk. Just as the head coach is directly responsible to owner of the team, so a Pastor is responsible to Jesus for the church he is pastoring. Because the head coach is responsible, he has been given authority to discharge those responsibilities. In the same way, because a Pastor is responsible to Jesus for the church, he must be given the authority to discharge those responsibilities. Jesus has given Pastors that authority and the local church needs to do the same. The head coach leads the sports team and a Pastor leads the Church.

The Team must all be doing the same thing – **on the same page**.

Abby & Brittany are a great example of this! Everyone has to have the same goal and be working to achieve that goal.

The Team must **stand as one** – debate / discuss as much as you need to, but when the vote is taken the Team must operate as though it was **unanimous!**

I see the ministry of a Deacon (and Associate Pastors and Ministry Leaders) as one of an **Armor-Bearer** to the Pastor. The title might give someone the wrong impression of the true nature of an Armor-Bearer's responsibilities and capabilities.

Armor-Bearers were often one of the **most highly skilled warriors** in the entire army. That's because an Armor-bearer doesn't just carry armor and weapons for his leader, he had the right weapon ready at just the right moment for the king to do battle effectively. In Scripture, we have 5 examples of Armor-Bearers --- Abimilech had an Armor-Bearer (**Judges 9: 54**); Jonathan's Armor-Bearer who helped him defeat the Philistines (**I Samuel 14: 6 – 15**); David for King Saul (**I Samuel 16: 21**); another Armor-Bearer for King Saul (**I Samuel 31: 4 – 6**); and Naharai one of the 30 Mighty Men, who was Armor-Bearer to Joab, the Captain of King David's army (**II Samuel 23: 37**).

But perhaps his **most important role** was to protect the back of the king. Just like a quarterback is most susceptible to a "blind site" hit, so it is with Pastors. Terry Nance in his book – *God's Armor Bearer, Volume 1* – says, "[The Armor Bearer] had the awesome responsibility of seeing to the safety of his officer" (pg. 11).

What does it mean to "have the back" of the Pastor? We can find out by looking at the Hebrew words for Armor-Bearer. **Naw-saw'** – primary meaning of "to lift up". The root of the second word **Kel-ee'** means "to end; complete finish, bring to pass, fulfill". From these two words we can see that the duty of the modern day Armor-Bearer is "to stand beside his leader to assist him, to lift him up and to protect him against any enemy that might attack him".

The specific duties of an Armor-Bearer as it relates to a Pastor include:

1. Be the Pastor's greatest supporter --- "a true Armor-Bearer will always display and produce an attitude of faith and peace" --- this is part of laying down our lives for our brother;
2. Have a deep sense of respect for his Pastor and acceptance of his leaders personality and way of doing things --- our goal is the same [to extend the Kingdom of God] even when the methods are different;
3. Walk in agreement with and submission to his Pastor --- we must remember that we submit to the Lord when we submit to God-appointed leaders --- the Pastor is responsible to God!; and
4. Serve the Pastor by following instructions immediately, correctly and fully --- this is a reflection of true submission --- all authority is responsibility-driven.

Characteristics of an Armor-Bearer include:

- Y Faithfully involved in the church – including financial support (tither?);
- Y Submitted to God-ordained authorities;
- Y Loyal;
- Y Optimistic – people of faith
- Y Disciplined in prayer

Y Able to keep control of their tongue – no murmuring or complaining

Y Humble --- sure of their calling and election (**II Peter 1: 10, 11**)

Well that’s a thumb nail sketch of the minister of an Armor-Bearer. I hope it gives you an idea of how they work alongside a Pastor.

CHARACTER – Deacons are role models / leaders in the congregation. Even in politics we see that character is **the** issue. How much more that is to be true in the Church!

I Timothy 3: 8 – 12 list the character qualities of a Deacon. They also give us a good picture of how Deacons are to conduct themselves:

NIV	NKJV
Worthy of respect - is honorable and of high moral character.	Reverent
Sincere – a person of integrity, who speaks the truth in love (Ephesians 4: 15).	Not double-tongued
Not indulging in much wine - is not controlled by external addictions.	Not given to much wine
Not pursuing dishonest gain - is not materialistic or greedy, in philosophy or conduct.	Not greedy
Keep hold of the deep truths of faith with a clear conscience – a person who is committed to the teachings of the Word of God in belief and behavior.	Hold the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience
First be tested; then if there is nothing against them – not a new believer, but one whose good “track record” is clearly evident.	First be tested. . .being <i>found</i> blameless
Not malicious talkers – Ephesians 4: 29 : “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” – Gossip / Backbiting!	Not slanderers
Temperate in everything - exhibits balance and control over areas of life.	Temperate in all things

Trustworthy in everything – a person of their word; dependable.	Faithful in all things
The husband of but one wife - exhibits proper respect and esteem for marriage and the Biblical mandates concerning it.	Husband of one wife
Manage his children and household well - exhibits proper concern and care for family; conducts family affairs on a Scriptural basis.	Ruling <i>their</i> children and their own houses well

Let me say something about the issue of confidentiality. In their advisory capacity, as well as in some portfolio responsibilities, Deacons/Leaders deal with things that are confidential in nature. It is essential that they ***maintain confidences*** at all times!

In some cases, the Pastor might even ask that a married Deacon not discuss some items with their spouses (However, I believe this should not be a common occurrence). However, each Deacon must determine if their spouse will safeguard confidential information. If they will ***not***, then the Deacon should not share confidential information with them.

SPIRITUAL MATURITY – I think it is obvious that a Deacon must be a spiritually mature **and** maturing person. Three of the character traits of a Deacon show that well:

- Y Worthy of respect
- Y Keep hold of the deep truths of faith with a clear conscience
- Y First be tested; then if there is nothing against them

Another aspect of a Deacon's spiritual maturity is that they are responsible for upholding the teachings of God's Word in the Spirit of Christ in the life and ministries of the church. Are they students of the Word? Do they study the Word on a regular basis? Can they communicate the truths of Scripture in an understandable manner? Do they live their lives according to the standard of the Scripture?

Another really important aspect of this for the health of a church is to be fully and radically committed to **Matthew 18: 15 – 17**:

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

A Deacon must be a faithful steward towards God. This involves much more than finances; it involves all aspects of their lives. [However, I have found that if a person is not faithful in finances, it is an indicator that other areas of their life may not measure up to the standard of Scripture.] Consistent and faithful support of the church in attendance,

finances, and cooperation with the programs of the church should be par for the course. **1 Corinthians 4: 2** reads, "Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful" (NKJV).

A Deacon is a leader / role model. It is important that Boards seriously accept the responsibility of being leaders in the church. Others will look to you as a Deacon to determine what they should do and how they should do it. Deacons should echo the words of **1 Corinthians 11:1** --- "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."

Let's talk about what it takes to become a leader. We find the key ingredient in the story of the Centurion and Jesus, found in **Matthew 8: 5 – 10** – "When Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to him, asking for help. "Lord," he said, "my servant lies at home paralyzed and in terrible suffering." Jesus said to him, "I will go and heal him." The centurion replied, "Lord, I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. But just say the word, and my servant will be healed. **For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me.** I tell this one, 'Go', and he goes; and that one, "Come", and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this', and he does it." When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, 'I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.'"

This centurion understood that to be a leader, you first must be **a good follower**. He understood that any authority he had as a commander came **because** he was **submitted** to those in authority above him. Submission to authority is crucial. It's been rightly said that you can never be a good leader until you've learned to be a good follower.

Richard Dresselhaus in his book **The Deacon and His Ministry** shares this well:

"The New Testament makes it clear that the primary task of Deacons is to serve. And the pastor, as much as anyone, needs their help. It is to them that the pastor looks for guidance and help in handling the affairs of the congregation. The entire church will feel the positive effects of a strong and trusting relationship between the pastor and the board of deacons. The harmony that exists in this relationship will soon be copied by the membership of the church."

Pastors, Deacons and Leaders can make a huge difference when they build strong relationships and address problems with honesty, prayer, and a willingness to work together. Issues need to be dealt with in love, honesty, and firmness. Unwise leadership allows issues and problems to escalate until they polarize the people and division takes place.

A last thought in this area ---

In recent months, the Lord has been having me pray that our churches will experience "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace". I have found that when this does not occur in our churches it is because people have chosen not to operate in the grace of the Lord to forgive others and to think the best of other people. I have found myself praying that everyone in the church will come into unity with the Pastor as he pursues God's vision for the church **OR** if they won't come into unity that they would find a church where they can!

The Body of Christ is designed to work together, not work in opposition to each other. I believe the lack of unity is a major reason the Church of Jesus Christ is anemic and not fulfilling the Great Commission. Each of us should make being in unity within the church one of our highest priorities.

QUALIFIED MEMBERS

It is essential that those who serve on Boards are truly qualified to fill the position. There's a reason that God lists 9 qualifications for a Deacon in **I Timothy 3: 8 – 12**. It is crucial that Board members are mature enough to handle the responsibilities of serving on a Board.

At times, pastor's feel pressure to just "fill a slot". My experience is that this typically results in a less than positive situation and sometimes in a terrible one. I believe it is better to function with fewer Board members, provided you are complying with any legal minimum requirements, than to have even one unqualified Board member.

Though these are probably obvious, let me state a couple of qualities that are important traits of a person who is "worthy of respect" and "sincere":

First, a Board member must be a person of the Word. A Board is responsible to represent God's interests and follow God's perspective when making decisions, a strong knowledge of the Bible is critical to fulfilling that responsibility. The Word reveals God's perspective on most subjects and so, a Board member must be "a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth". (**II Timothy 2: 15**)

Second, a Board member must be a person of prayer. It is crucial that the decisions of the Board be Spirit-led and prayer is essential for a person to be led by the Spirit. This is another important aspect of a Board member being able to fulfill their responsibility to the Lord.

Third, a Board member must be able to keep confidential information **confidential!** There are some things discussed in a Board meeting that are proper only for the ears of those who are in the meeting. A good Board member knows that and makes every effort to keep confidential matters confidential.

Fourth, a Board member must be dependable. They must do what they say they're going to do, as the Board depends on each member to fulfill their individual responsibilities if the Board is going to effectively help the church be all that God intends for it to be.

PRAYER

As mentioned above, prayer is an essential discipline for a Board to fulfill their responsibilities. I recommend that the Board spend their initial time together in prayer to put them in a frame of mind and spirit that acknowledges their dependence on the Lord to make decisions and provide counsel that honors Him. This involves more than an opening prayer in the meeting and in my opinion, should be at least 15 minutes and better 30 minutes.

In addition, when considering significant issues, a Board would be well advised to "take a prayer break" to allow the Lord to speak into the situation through the Word and the Holy Spirit.

Sometimes this break might need to be longer than just a recess in a meeting and so the Board may need to spend several days or more to prayerfully consider what decision it should make.

USE AN AGENDA

An agenda is a guide to help the Board focus on what it needs to accomplish and to be as efficient as possible with their time. In my opinion, proper utilization of an agenda requires several conditions:

1. Adopt the agenda as a guide for the meeting and establish a target time for adjournment of the meeting. If an agenda is going to work well, all Board members should be encouraged to add items to the agenda prior to its publication. All items on the agenda should be handled prior to adding any new items to the meeting.
2. Maximize the efficient use of the Board's time. This is accomplished by doing as much work as possible prior to the meeting.
 - a. Board members should be given as much information as possible with enough advance notice to allow them to prayerfully review it. This information includes minutes, financial reports and other information related to decisions that will be made. Board members should ask any questions they have on this information before the meeting. In this way, action on these items can be taken while investing as little time as possible in the meeting.
 - b. Consider limiting discussion to 10 minutes, unless a second 10 minutes is unanimously approved. If the Board cannot arrive at a decision in this time, the item should be carried forward to the next meeting. This gives the Board time to prayerfully consider what action should be taken.

USING AN AGENDA. . . The Pastor must guide the Board meeting in an orderly manner and maintain an efficient schedule. The Chair does not dominate the meeting but simply leads the Board through the items of business in a spirit that will bring honor to God's kingdom. We must remember that even though we do all we can to be organized and operate within proper guidelines, we are serving the Lord and His work.

In **I Timothy 3: 15 (NKJV)** we read, "I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." The meeting that conducts the business of the church is a spiritual meeting just as much as a Bible study or Sunday service. The focus may be somewhat different, but the conduct of church business is essential to the health and proper functioning of the local church.

John Maxwell states: "Two common problems in board meetings are: (1) each person has his own agenda, and (2) the pastor has a difficult time maintaining control of the meeting." If a Board meeting is going to be effective and honor the time of the Board Members, it is critical to avoid digressions by sticking to an agenda prepared before the meeting.

There is more than one way to establish an agenda. A traditional approach would create an agenda with the following categories:

- I. Call meeting to order / prayer
- II. Minutes of previous meetings
- III. Treasurer's Report
- IV. Unfinished Business
- V. New Business
- VI. Portfolio Reports (only applicable if Board Members have assigned portfolios)
- VII. Adjournment

An approach recommended by John Maxwell would be to group items into three categories into an agenda that might look something like this:

- I. Call meeting to order / prayer
- II. Minutes of previous meetings
- III. Information Items
- IV. Study Items
- V. Action Items
- VI. Adjournment

Information Items. . . To start off on a positive note, give a number of positive reports on the ministry of the church in this section. (EG: number of people saved in the last week; an exciting Baptism Service; etc.) This would be a place to give news of upcoming events, meetings, or special services. Use this time to inform and to remind the Board of the reason for the meeting – to conduct business for the Lord.

Information items should be chosen specifically because they are positive, exciting, and set the tone for the rest of the meeting. Spend no more than 5 minutes in this area; just enough time to inspire hearts and prepare them for the most productive segment of the meeting.

Study Items. . . This part of the agenda always contains the most items. Ninety-five percent of meeting time should be spent studying or discussing these issues and items of interest. Your goal during this part of the meeting is to brainstorm ideas. Work to get **every** possible suggestion – and objection – on the table. [One idea is to not allow any negatives on an idea until all the positives have been shared. This allows every idea the best chance of

being adopted, though in my experience this does not mean that every idea will be adopted.]

Never vote on any item that you have listed as a study item. The pressure of a vote causes people to take sides and discourages free and creative thought. Never vote on a study item before the next meeting.

You may keep some study items on the agenda for months, allowing every option and objection to be put on the table and explored. Other subjects may be study items for only one meeting and then moved on to an Action Item in the next session. **Keeping** items in the study section of the agenda allows people to process information without feeling threatened, to spend time in prayer on the item and eventually to reach a consensus. Only then is an item ready to be put before the Board for action.

Action Items. . . The final section of the agenda contains items, which have already been in the study section for at least one meeting, have already been discussed, and are ready for a vote. You should not have to spend more than 5 minutes on matters to be voted on. If the Board has been candid and the discussion and study have been thorough, there is no reason to spend a lot of time in this section.

This would also be the place where the financial reports would be reviewed and approved.

If you are currently frustrated by Board meetings, you are not alone. Every pastor has been there, and most of us have dreamed of a world without committees. But the truth is we need our board members. They give perspective, experience, and strength that we don't have alone. A well-managed Board actually multiplies the efforts of the pastor and staff in accomplishing the ministry of the local church. Using an agenda effectively helps the Board keep focused and will improve their efficiency without increasing the time spent in Board meetings.

GOOD COMMUNICATION

There is a good saying – “Informed people are happy people!” Over the years, I have found that lack of information has led to some very intense conflicts in churches. When people don't have accurate information they are liable to believe whatever anyone tells them!?! Most people are not nosy, busybodies. They are concerned members who want to be part of blessing the church. Keep them posted on what is going on in the church – it will serve you well. This is particularly true of Board members and other members of the leadership team.

Along these lines, another good saying is – “Leaders should never be surprised!” A number of years ago, Mark Rutland spoke on this at Minister / Spouse Seminar. The first people to know what you're thinking or planning or considering doing should be your leadership team.

[At Maple Grove, we had a Body of Elders, a Board of Deacons and a Leadership Council. I wanted each group to be well informed at the appropriate time. I tried to make sure that I never announced something that these groups didn't have advance knowledge of. I informed / got input from the Elders first (often formulating decisions with them), then I

informed / got the input of the Deacons (including Staff), then I informed / got input from the Leadership Council and finally we informed the congregation.]

We should never put a leader in the position of having to answer the question, “Did you know about this?” with a “No”. Appropriate information at appropriate times builds a sense of trust and being a valued member of a team. Little or no information breeds uncertainty and a lack of trust in our leadership ability.

I previously mentioned the importance of providing Board Members with information in advance of Board Meetings. Not only does that provide for efficiency in the Meetings, but it helps them feel as though they can properly consider the information they need to in order to make quality decisions. Again this builds a sense of trust and encourages teamwork.

Communication can be difficult. One of the reasons is that you know what you mean when you say something, but others can take away a different meaning from what you meant. The best way to overcome this difficulty is to communicate in many different ways. I don't think you can ever over-communicate with your leadership team, so it is better to err on the side of too much communication than on not enough.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The Board has fiduciary responsibility for the finances of the church – legally according to the State of Minnesota, as well as according to Scripture. Therefore, clear and understandable financial information is essential for them to fulfill their responsibilities.

Many church people do not understand how to read a financial report (to say nothing of pastors). The goal of a financial report is to inform people of what has happened in the finances and where we stand financially right now in a way that they can understand. I have a couple of suggestions to accomplish that:

- 1) **Simple is better!** The more complex the financial report the greater the opportunity for people to become confused and not understand what they are reading. I find that too much detail also confuses many readers of financial reports. The challenge is to find the right balance between too much and not enough information. I have found that presenting a summary of key financial information prior to reviewing the financial reports can be very helpful. [The summary might include things like – current bank account balances – any unusual bills that have been incurred – current balances on loans – etc. Each Board will determine what they consider to be their key information.]
- 2) **Compare to a plan.** Comparing financial results to a plan focuses the discussion on the financial reports on what is most important. This is one of the primary functions of budgeting. A church establishes a budget and then the actual financial activity should be compared to the budget. In this way, the Board can focus on the areas that are out of kilter with the plan.

The first thing I look at in financial reports is the column that shows the amount of any differences between budget and actual. That way I spend my time on what did not turnout

as expected rather than looking at all sorts of numbers that really don't need my attention, because things happened pretty much the way we planned.

Another thing I recommend is that rather than plopping down a financial report and asking if anyone has questions, the Treasurer or Financial Secretary or Pastor should talk briefly about the highlights of the financial report. This would include identifying where the budget and actual is significantly different and giving the reason or reasons why. In this way, you try to answer questions before they come up. This approach says that you've already done your homework (reviewed the financial reports) and are on top of what is happening financially at the church. Such an approach instills confidence in the Board.

- 3) ***Have an Internal Review each year.*** Performing an annual Internal Review of the church's financial reports instills confidence in the congregation that someone is "watching the store". It makes good common sense and hopefully results in a declaration of "good job" for those who handle the day-to-day financial activities and reporting.

The following information deals with the idea of an Internal Review:

It is often recommended that a church should have a Certified Audit of its Annual Financial Report in the same way we do for the District Council. As a former auditor, it is my opinion that this recommendation is unrealistic for a small-to-medium sized church. [I would define a small-to-medium sized church as having Sunday Morning attendance of less than 500.] The cost of an audit is generally cost-prohibitive and in my opinion, not good stewardship of such a church's finances.

However, it **is** important to have someone examine the Annual Financial Report of a church ***of any size*** for the following reasons:

1. It is a prudent step to ensure that the finances are being properly handled, recorded and reported to the Board of Deacons and Congregation.
2. It removes any question about the performance or integrity of the Treasurer (and Financial Secretary if one is used) as it relates to the church's finances.
3. It provides the Congregation, as well as others who know of this procedure, with confidence that financial matters are being handled in an accurate and proper manner.

So, if a Certified Audit is cost-prohibitive to a small-to-medium sized church, how do we accomplish such an examination? At Maple Grove Assembly, we developed an Internal Review process that was performed each year on the Annual Financial Report before it was published to the Congregation. I had the District's Auditor look over the procedures and made some adjustments to the procedures at his recommendation.

The following is an overview of an Annual Internal Review [I have more detailed procedures available in both printed and electronic form for those who would like to implement an Annual Internal Review process in their church. I am willing to meet with your Board of Deacons or a Review Team to tailor the detailed procedures to your situation and Annual Financial Report. Then I can answer any questions that may arise.]:

GOAL. . .A review is conducted by a Review Team to help the congregation have confidence that the Annual Financial Report presented at the Annual Business Meeting properly represents the financial activities of a church. The Review Team should consist of church members who do not have any responsibility for the financial / accounting system in use. The Chair of the Review Team should be a Deacon, who does not serve as the Church Treasurer.

REVIEW APPROACHES. . .A review consists of three types of review:

Y **First**, the Review Team reviews the accounting procedures that are used to carry out business and then, report that business in the Financial Reports of the church;.

Y **Second**, the Review Team reviews all transactions of the church for overall reasonableness. During this phase of review, the Review Team may request that support for expenditures be supplied to them to determine the propriety of the transaction; and

Y **Third**, the Review Team reviews the Annual Financial Report to determine that it is supported by the accounting records of the church and that it is clerically accurate.

Finally, the Review Team may make recommendations for improvements to the financial / accounting system based on the results of their review.

TRAIN / PROVIDE ORIENTATION FOR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

All too often there is little or no training of new Board Members. Folks are willing to serve and are just thrown into the mix of a Board, without really understanding their role and responsibilities. This can result in confusion, discouragement and even adversarial attitudes.

I included the following topics in my orientation of new Board Members:

Y **General Responsibilities** – including The Role of a Deacon;

Y **Attendance Expectation for Various Meetings** – Board Meetings, Leadership Council Meetings and Business Meetings --- I also reviewed the general format of our Board Meetings;

Y **Prayer Ministry Teams** – Board Members and their spouses were assigned to a Prayer Ministry Team, which ministered to the congregation during worship services;

Y **Information** – we discussed how we disseminated information to the Board and what they should do with the information provided (EG: read it **before** the Board Meeting);

Y **Policies** – I provided them with the current policies that were in force at the church and covered a couple of key policies;

Y **Board Procedures** – I reviewed the portfolios of the Board --- how to get an item on the agenda --- Staff Evaluations --- Nominations Committee --- Internal Review Committee among others;

Y **Financial Procedures** – I explained the internal control procedures in place for Cash Receipts, Cash Disbursements, inputting financial information into the computer, bank reconciliations and the budgeting process;

Y **Reviewing Financial Reports** – I explained how to read our Financial Reports efficiently and effectively --- we actually worked our way through the most recent Financial Report as an example; and

Y **Annual Board Calendar** – I provided each Board Member with a Calendar of Business Items that the Board would be handling throughout the year.

We also provided each Board Member with a notebook that included the following items:

- Y Current Articles of Incorporation and Bylaws;
- Y Meeting Agendas and Minutes for at least the last 6 months;
- Y Financial Reports for at least the last 6 months;
- Y Current church policies and forms;
- Y Monthly Calendar of Board Business Items; and
- Y Current year budgets.

We asked each Board Member to pass along their Board Notebook at the end of their term.

A trained / equipped Board provides a great foundation for working effectively and efficiently together to lead the Church of Jesus Christ.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Unfortunately all too often, Boards get involved in conflict resolution in the church. The Bible provides us with the principle for resolving conflicts in **Matthew 18: 15 – 20**. The specifics of this instance is dealing with someone who sins against us, but the principle works – in most part, for any conflict between people.

Before we look at the details of the principle, let me say that Church Leaders must be **fully committed** to these principles if they are going to have a healthy church. Perhaps the greatest disease that will destroy the health of a church is **gossip**. It destroys not only churches, it destroys people (for whom Christ died)! You must demand that you and your church stringently follow these principles otherwise they are largely ineffective. Let's look at those principles from **Matthew 18**:

Y **V. 15** – “If a brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, **just between the two of you**. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.” Conflict should be resolved at the lowest possible level. Only the people who are in conflict should sit down and work out the conflict. Hopefully they can get it resolved. [**Gossip** begins at this stage when someone who is not part of the problem gets involved.]

EG: A person comes to you and says, “Jeff, I’m having a real problem with Stan.” **What do you do at that point?**

“Have you talked with Stan?” **No.** “I cannot talk with you about it. Talk with Suzie and if you can’t resolve it just between the two of you, let me know I’d be happy to sit down with the two of you to help work it out.”

I find it is imperative to deal with gossip by “nipping it in the bud”! If I, as pastor, discuss issues that people have with others, I am endorsing gossip. We usually couch it in terms of “just so you know how to pray” or “I just want to get your counsel on how to handle this”. But in the end, it **is** gossip and will foster gossip in my congregation.

This is where we must be radically committed to the **Matthew 18** process and require people to meet with the other party “just between the two of [them]”, before we get engaged in the situation as one of the “two or three witnesses”. This approach will promote health in interpersonal relationships in our churches and help the whole church to be healthier.

It is essential that we not allow a person to talk with us about a situation unless they have first spoken with the other party and tried to reconcile their differences. If they have spoken with the other party and the matter isn’t resolved is it time to move onto Step 2 **before** discussing any of the details with anyone else. You’ll see why in Step 2 below.

Y V. 16 – “But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of **two or three witnesses**.” If the people involved in the conflict cannot work it out, they should move onto Step 2 when they would involve witnesses to help work out the problem.

What does this verse mean by witnesses? This is a critical question to answer if we are going to work within the principles of this passage. These witnesses are not to be taken in a legal sense, but in a spiritual one. These witnesses are called to “bear witness” to the situation **in relationship to** Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

The best way for this to work is for the witnesses **not** to talk with either party **before** they all sit down together. The witnesses do not need to be “**prepared**” ahead of time, they just need to hear both sides and then prayerfully consider what the Word of God and the Spirit of God have to say about the situation.

It is best if both parties commit themselves to abide by the decision of the witnesses regardless of what they decide. This requires a good deal of grace and trust in the Lord to work through His principles and His people.

This part of the process may require **3 witnesses** – one chosen by each person and one chose by those two people. It is critical that the witnesses meet certain **qualifications** – they must be **(1)** a Christian, **(2)** Committed to following the will of God (His Word and His Spirit), **(3)** Comfortable confronting people and willing to speak the truth in love, **(4)** Compassionate towards those who have been wounded and **(5)** able to maintain

Confidences. The witnesses may well need to take the matter to prayer and then discuss it among themselves apart from the parties in conflict.

Hopefully the parties will abide by the decision of the witnesses. However, if they are not willing, Church Leadership may need to go to Step 3 below.

Y V. 17 – “If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or tax collector.” **WOW!** This gets pretty tough. That’s true, which should give us pause before we come to this step.

Let me qualify this step – it only applies when a person is involved in sin and they will not confess it and repent of it. When we have a difference of opinion or other non-sin based conflict, I do not believe this step applies.

Let me also say that if the sin is only directed toward a specific individual rather than being a public sin against the Church, I do not believe this is a mandatory step. This step is the next step to be taken, if the offended party so chooses. If they decide to just forgive and forget at this point, I believe they can just drop it and go on with life.

Lastly, this step does not apply if one of the parties does not like the answer that comes from the witnesses. This only applies where a person is sinning and will not acknowledge the sin and repent of it. This is **not** a court of law, where if you don’t like the outcome you just keep appealing. In the second step, you submit yourself to the witnesses and need to accept their decision as from the Lord. So that means – choose your witnesses well!

Having talked about these guiding principles for conflict resolution, let’s move on to talk about the details of the **process**.

Quick – it is important to deal with conflict as soon as possible to keep it as small as possible. [EG: Wildfires – the longer they are allowed to burn the harder they are to put out!]

No Anonymous Accusations – an anonymous accusation is simply a rumor; credibility and resolution come from all parties being identified (no surrogates allowed!). Remember – a Deacons role is to represent God and to support the ministry of the pastor, so Deacons are not conduits to bring anonymous accusations / issues to the Pastor or Board.

Self-Controlled – Emotions tend to escalate things rather than keep them under control. “My dear brothers, take note of this **everyone** should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.” (**James 1: 19, 20 NIV**)

Listen / Listen / Listen – in order to truly understand the nature of the conflict and so, to resolve it in a Godly way, we must listen to the issues of the conflict. We must pay attention to their words, their emotions, their body language and what they do **not** say!

After we’ve listened, we need to listen some more – be slow to speak. “The first speech in a court case is always convincing – until the cross-examination starts! (**Proverbs 18:17 TM**) It is essential to consider both sides!

Remember this – often “the issue is **not** the issue”! Most often, people feel the need to “hang their hat on something” that is more acceptable than the real issue. When this happens they tend to use the following issues as their “smoke screen”, which are usually focused on the pastor:

1. **Preaching:** Inadequate preparation, delivery, and content.
2. **Personal preferences:** Unsatisfactory grooming, attire, home, car, vacations, spending, hobbies, friends, and politics.
3. **Personal qualities:** A perceived lack of warmth, enthusiasm, listening skills, accessibility; poor relations with both genders, youth, people of all ages, families, and singles.
4. **Family members:** Unacceptable manners that include:
 - How the spouse dresses, drives, acts, looks, prays, sings, and cooks.
 - How the children behave in school, church, home, and community.
 - Anything the church disapproves that are miscellaneous, non-church related items.
5. **Congregational administration:** A perceived lack in any area of the church including the budget, the time the pastor spends in the office, in visitation, in committees, and in community involvement.
6. **Pastoral availability:** A perceived neglect of pastoral duties, adult education, visiting the sick, choir, fund raising, retreats, Sunday School curriculum, teacher training, officiating at ceremonies, and recruiting new members.
7. **Theological attitudes:** Dislikes can be expressed concerning pastoral prayers, the order of service, selected texts, music, and traditions that are not observed.

If these performance issues do not accomplish their goal, they will adjust the issues to matters of character. Rabbi Edwin Friedman (***Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue***) researched the real reasons for conflict and found that they often come from:

1. **Unresolved family issues** – “The intensity with which some laypeople become invested in their religious institutions makes the church. . . a prime arena for the displacement of important, unresolved family issues.”
2. **Change in the status quo** – this can be in almost any area including:

Pastor’s Personal Life (this area also includes other significant pastoral or lay leadership) – a birth, death, illness in the pastor’s family; an extended family crisis, such as aging parents; marital misconduct in the pastor’s family; changes in the leader’s family; new or prolonged community involvement; etc.

Pastor's Professional Life – the pastor attains a professional advancement; earns a new academic degree; receives new denominational responsibilities; receives an extension of ministry term; etc.

Congregational Life – there is a shift of power from one group to another, especially if initiated by the pastor; pastor introduces racial diversity to the congregation; there is a change in the average age of the congregation; there is a change in organizational philosophy; etc.

Church's Professional Leadership – the pastor hires or fires a key professional staff member (especially the administrative secretary); an interpersonal conflict arises or is resolved between two key leaders; changes in the hierarchy of the church or denomination; death or retirement of a founder or charismatic leaders; a restructuring that centralizes authority; etc.

3. **Life-cycle Events** – great stress occurs before, during and after various significant events in the life of a church – marriages, divorces, deaths, etc.
4. **Pastoral Over-Functioning and Burnout** – Pastors who try to “do it all” and become responsible when others do not carry out their responsibilities are prone to burn out. “The most dangerous issue about over-functioning,” asserts Friedman, “is that if over-functioning is a manifestation of anxiety, it will serve to promote it as well.”
5. **Triangulation** – in-direct communication between two parties by using a third party to carry messages between the principal parties.

Remember that often – “the issue is **not** the issue”!

Control Your Emotions – emotions tend to amplify our response or change a response into a reaction. Emotional responses include anger, defensiveness, taking up another's offense, fear of rejection, projection of personal hurts, etc. If we are going to rationally resolve the conflict, we cannot afford to get emotional about the issues. Don't let it get personal!

One issue at a time – we must focus on one issue if we are to resolve the issue; when a person wants to unload everything, it is often an indication that they are not really interested in resolution, but simply want to air their grievances. This is not the point of conflict resolution!

Behave! – It is important to tell everyone that certain behavior will not be tolerated:

- Y Getting personal – name calling, rejecting, deprecating or discrediting the other person, judging the person instead of the actions;
- Y Mind reading – attributing evil motives to others;
- Y Hearsay – remember no surrogates allowed!;
- Y Interruptions; and
- Y Unfounded accusations – if a person makes an accusation they must be able to provide proof.

Consider every option – when looking for a solution we must be open to any option – which fits with the Scripture – otherwise we risk finding a solution rather than **the** solution.

We must always remember that our ultimate goal is to please God, not man. However, we can do that in a Christ-like manner that glorifies God even if man doesn't like the outcome.

The following list of “**Ten Most Predictable Times of Conflict**” has been developed by several people who have studied church conflict:

1. **Easter** - Easter is usually the busiest time of year — even outdoing Christmas. At Easter there are more programs and worship services. Attendance is up, which creates more stress and tension. This stress can cause underlying conflicts to surface.
2. **Stewardship Campaigns/Budget Time** - An every-member canvas for financial pledges can uncover deeper problems in the church, and the problems may have little to do with money. A canvas provides a channel to voice dissatisfaction and complaints on any topic.
3. **Addition of New Staff** - The most frequent type of conflict in congregations is between the pastor and key leaders in the church. This is particularly true when a new pastoral staff member is called. New staff means not only changes in relationships and procedures, but also changes in directions and priorities.
4. **Change in Leadership Style** - When a congregation hires a pastor whose leadership style differs from his predecessor, conflict is a near certainty. Changes in leadership provide opportunities for natural conflict due to the change.
5. **Pastor's Vacation** - Festering problems will often surface while the pastor is away. A dissatisfied group will gather to discuss problems in the pastor's absence, one group begins squabbling with another, or the people subconsciously panic because they unduly depend on the pastor.
6. **Changes in Pastor's Family** - Changes in a pastor's family, even for the better, will cause conflict in the congregation. These changes can create jealousy and envy issues. The church may feel neglected.
7. **Introduction of Different Generations into the Church** - Conflict can occur between the various generations – traditionalists / baby boomers / Gen-Xers / Millennials. Conflict comes from the difference in lifestyles.

8. **The Completion of a New Building** - "After the completion of a new building clergy were vulnerable to firing" (Alban Institute and Pastoral Firings). The change in leadership focus (from building to programs) is the primary issue.
9. **Loss of Membership** - As resources (money or people) dwindle, tension increases. When the pain becomes great, there is a felt need to blame someone. The blame is usually pinned on a person or group, even though the people they blame may have done little if anything to contribute to the difficulty.
10. **Increase in Church Membership** - As congregations grow, their personalities change. Some people like the old personality better than the new personality.

- Adapted from *Mastering Conflict and Controversy* by Edward G. Dobson, Speed B. Leas, and Marshall Shelley © 1992 by Christianity Today International.

Take this for what it's worth. Do not automatically begin to look for conflict in these situations, but also remember that Jesus said we should be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (**Matthew 16: 10**).

The following is one tool to evaluate whether the conflict has gotten to the point where some assistance from an outside source, like the District, might be necessary:

1. Declining Morale – Is the adversarial environment of the conflict unfavorably impacting the morale of the church?
2. Strained Relationships – Are Board, Staff and / or Attenders experiencing reduced communication resulting in tense and uncomfortable relations and greater isolation?
3. Numeric Losses – Is there an increase in absenteeism? Are people leaving?
4. Financial Losses – Is there a decline in church income?
5. Increased Workloads – Is there an increased workload for volunteers to (a) fill-in, (b) recruit and (c) train others for abandoned ministry posts, putting strain on the entire system?
6. Ministry Curtailment – Is there a decreased volunteer pool or other resources that threaten the continuation of valuable ministries?
7. Degraded Decision Making – Are leaders making unilateral or reactionary decisions instead of collaborative or calmly reasoned ones? Have leaders and members already begun to regret things said or done due to tension or stress?
8. Emotional and Physical Toll – Is the physical and emotional health and stability of people being negatively impacted? Are people experiencing burn-out or depression?
9. Loss of Vision – Has the church lost its passion and vision?
10. Loss of Reputation – Is in-fighting undermining the community's perception of the church?

If 3 or more of these categories are present in the conflict you are experiencing, the leadership should strongly consider involving someone from outside the body to help them resolve the conflict in a healthy and productive manner.

In **Matthew 5: 9 (NLT)**, Jesus commends those who are peacemakers – “God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God.” In **Romans 12: 18 (NLT)** we are instructed to, “Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.”

Resolving conflict requires both sides of the issues to work together to restore biblical unity, which is established and maintained through “the bond of peace”. Sometimes that does not happen, but we should be committed to do all that we can to support reconciliation.

Bivocational.org identifies **10 Surefire ways to GROW a Conflict**:

- Y Do not acknowledge the existence of the conflict.
- Y Acknowledge the conflict, but then avoid or ignore those with whom the conflict exists.
- Y Privately talk to others to enlist support for you and your position.
- Y Continue to say, "We'll handle it" (even though up to this point the conflict has continued to escalate based on your "handling it").
- Y Characterize those causing you problems in very uncharitable terms.
- Y Do all that you can to promote your own cause or to save your own reputation at the expense of the other side.
- Y Take unilateral actions to gain the upper hand.
- Y Threaten to leave the church.
- Y Fill in the blank for your specific church:_____.
- Y Fail to obtain the help of someone from outside the church to assist you in resolving the conflict.

Let's “make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” in our churches!

Ephesians 4: 3 (NIV)

USE OPERATING POLICIES

Another “troublesome word” that ranks up there right alongside budget is **policies**! Many people think of policies as restrictive and controlling rather than as liberating and empowering. God's Ten Commandments, as well as His other commandments, are similar to policies. They

define the parameters of appropriate conduct. The key difference between the Ten Commandments and Operating Policies is that policies are **not** inviolable and exceptions **can** be made to them. The key to making exceptions to Operating Policies is to make them thoughtfully and prayerfully without regard for who is requesting the exception. Exceptions should be made because there is a compelling reason to make it, **not** because of who is asking for the exception.

Each of God's Commandments includes a promise and a protection. The promise has to do with a positive blessing for obedience and protection has to do with avoiding the consequences that come from disobedience.

Policies should be designed to establish guidelines defining acceptable, appropriate conduct in given situations. Policies provide a promise that things done according to policy are pre-approved and therefore acceptable to church leadership. When policies are followed they also provide a protection from charges of misconduct and the consequences that follow misconduct.

In addition, policies establish "a track to run on", so that there is no need to "invent the wheel" when similar situations arise – just run on the track provided. This consistency gives a church confidence that things are handled in a mature, measured way regardless of who is involved.

Just to reiterate – policies are **not** designed to be "engraved in stone". There are times, albeit very limited times if the policy is well constructed, when an exception to the policy is not only warranted, but reasonable. Part of the responsibility of leadership is to approve exceptions to a policy when that is appropriate.

Moderation is a key in establishing church policies. You don't need a policy for every little action, but a general policy that provides guidelines for conduct is very helpful. Here are some thoughts on possible Church Operating Policies:

Operating Foundation --- a general statement that **all** conduct in **every** situation is to be guided by the teachings and principles of the Bible, after all it is our infallible guide for faith **and** conduct --- I know one pastor who limits conduct / decisions to what is not immoral, illegal or unscriptural; I think that approach has merit

Building Policies --- these might include a Key Policy (who should have a key to the building / offices / etc.) --- Use of Church Policy (what things are not permitted, what are the costs of using the church facilities, etc.)

Transportation Policies --- Approved Drivers (by qualifications) --- Safety Rules (use of seat belts, abiding by the speed limits, etc.) --- Church-Owned Vehicle Inspection / Maintenance Routines --- Use of Non-Owned Vehicles

Church Attendance Policies --- while we encourage all people to attend our churches, a person convicted of sexual misconduct poses significant risks that cannot be overlooked --- this is particularly true if the misconduct involved minors

Screening of Children and Youth Workers --- our greatest treasure is people and the highest "people trust" we are given is our children and youth --- this policy should establish the requirements for effective screening of those who work with our children or youth, including whether a criminal background check is required

Financial Policies --- Use of Tithes --- Use Designated Gifts --- Financial Records --- Financial Reporting --- Fund Raising policies --- Purchasing / Payment policies --- Risk Management approach --- Accountable Reimbursement Policy (a “hot topic” area today is church-owned computers and cell phones)

Employment Policies --- Vacations --- Paid Time Off --- Unpaid Time Off --- Benefits Package --- Workplace Guidelines (including attendance, dress, etc.)

Appropriate Interpersonal Conduct Policy --- Counseling Approach (re members of the opposite gender, etc.) --- Confidentiality --- Sexual Harassment

This listing is intended to be thought provoking rather than exhaustive. In addition, depending on your circumstances, not all of these policies may apply to your church.

Having said all that, the **absolute key** to policies is not that you write them down and adopt them, but that you **follow** them. Having a policy written down but not followed is a waste of time and paper. In fact in my estimation, having a policy written down, but not followed exposes the church to a greater legal risk than not having a policy.

This document is not meant to be all-encompassing or the end all of Best Practices for Boards. We've covered a lot of practices that would be beneficial for Boards to follow as they lead their churches, however there are probably other areas that could be covered.