

TRENDS IN GOVERNANCE AND MINISTRY

William M. Easum, Sacred Cows Make Gourmet Burgers

A new form of congregational life is dragging Christians kicking and screaming into the twenty-first century. The self-understanding, focus, corporate culture, leadership, organizational styles, and strategies are radically different from those experienced through the twentieth century. The future church offers new opportunities and problems and requires a new mind-set. This new form of congregational life is with us now. I call it the permission-giving network.

Permission-giving churches ...

- believe that the role of God's people is to minister to people, in the world, every day of the week, by living out their spiritual gifts instead of running the church by sitting on committees and making decisions about what can or cannot be done.
- encourage autonomous, on-the-spot decision making by collaborative individuals and self-organizing teams.
- encourage ministry to be delivered any time, any place, by anyone, no matter what.
- have leaders who are secure enough to equip others for ministry and then get out of their way and let them develop their ministry even if it is not something in which they might participate.
- function around a network of collaborative individuals and teams.
- develop a flat organizational structure that encourages and facilitates ministry instead of coordinating or managing it.

Differences between traditional organizations and permission-giving networks:

| <u>The issue</u> | <u>Traditional</u> | <u>Permission-giving</u> |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| Structure | layered/individual | spider web/team |
| Job Descriptions | narrowly focused | mission statements |
| Staff/Key Leaders | direct/control | equip/facilitate |
| Leadership | top-down | shared |
| Informational Flow | controlled/limited | open/accessible |
| Rewards | offices/seniority | team- and skill-based |
| Ministry Process | leaders improve | teams improve |

Dan Hotchkiss, Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership

Governance means “owning” the congregation, exercising ultimate control of its human and material resources and ensuring that it serves its mission.

Ministry is most of the rest of what a congregation does – achieving the inward and outward results the congregations exists to achieve.

A simple way to see the difference between governance and ministry is by the results each kind of work produces. Both governance and ministry, ideally, produce relationships, enthusiasm, and renewed faith. But each also generates a distinctive set of outcomes: Governance produces minutes, policies, mission statements, goals, and strategic-planning documents. Ministry brings into being worship services, study groups, mission trips, service projects, mowed lawns, happy children, and renewed hope. One too-simple summary might be that governance produces words on paper, and ministry produces action. The reality is only a bit more complicated.

Congregations that successfully revise their structure to be more responsive and adaptive most frequently choose to assign governance authority to a board of six to eight. Such a board is small enough to engage in serious discernment work and so small that it should be obvious to everyone that it can't legitimately do its work in isolation. The congregation exercises its control not by making many small decisions but by making a few large ones well. An essential part of the board's responsibility is to choose wisely which few subjects merit congregational attention, and to host a rich, reflective dialogue among the members on those subjects.

Anthony B. Robinson, Transforming Congregational Culture

But today the new post-Christendom, postmodern era is upon us, and the church is once again seeing that “mission” is not a department, a budget, the activity of a designated “mission” committee or the transfer of resources overseas. In this new time, everything the church does is, in some sense, mission.

This is the backdrop for the shift from “board culture to ministry culture.” The work that was asked of congregation members in earlier times, participating in running the church, has been changed in this new time to a calling of congregation members to be engaged in ministry themselves, not simply to manage the church's ministry and the clerk's ministry.

All Christians can be involved in ministry. For some, their daily occupations will be the primary arena of ministry; for others, it will be their vocation as parents; others will take part in ministries that call forth their particular gifts. None of this should be taken to mean that congregations do not require effective governance and administration. They certainly do: good governance and effective administration are important and necessary. Those individuals who have and use such gifts within the congregation, whether as staff members or volunteers, are a great asset to any church. This is however, but one form of ministry. Many congregations can reduce the structures of governance and administration, thus freeing people for other forms of ministry and re-defining the ministry of the laity so that we not think of it primarily as managing the church.