

GOVERNANCE DISCUSSION
MICHIGAN CONFERENCE OF CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN
CHURCHES
CENTER FOR CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHP
February 20, 2010
Olivet College
Olivet, Michigan

What are driving the questions of governance?

- We can't get enough volunteers to fill all our board and committee slots
- We can't get younger people to join our committees and we need fresh voices
- We can't seem to make changes in our church without upsetting someone
- When someone proposes something new, it automatically gets shot down.
- Committee meetings are boring. I don't feel like I'm contributing anything.
- I've got too much to do to waste my time in meetings. I do enough of that at work.
- There's too much politics in the church. I think church should be different.
- There are too many chiefs and not enough indians.
- We have great ideas but we can't seem to *do* anything.
- All we ever do is talk.
- I'm happy to help out, but I can't make a three year commitment!
- Does any of this really matter?

What are the purposes of governance?

- To establish community norms
- To structure the organization for legal purposes
- To communicate clearly how the objectives of the organization are structured
- To establish authority
- To drive organizational purpose

What is *Congregational* governance?

- self-governing: "a local or Congregational Church derives its power and authority directly from Christ and is not subject to any ecclesiastical government exterior or superior to itself." (Walker quoting Boston Platform)
- constitution and bylaws are prepared with the authority of, and adopted by the membership in a duly called church meeting. (Abercrombie)
- "Church power under Chris resides not in any priesthood or clergy, nor in the officers of the church, but in the church itself, and it is derived through the church to its officers from Christ..." (Abercrombie quoting the 1865 Boston Platform.)
- "officers in a church are necessary to its well-being, and to its functions, though not to its existence..." (Abercrombie quoting the 1865 Boston Platform.)
- "a church may designate any member or members to some definite work in its behalf" ... (Abercrombie quoting the 1865 Boston Platform.)

How are governance and mission related?

- Who is the Church's "customer" or "client"? It is your mission; i.e., what it is Christ has called you into being to do. (Dan Hotchkiss, Alban)
- Governance must serve the mission of the gathered body
- When governance structure no longer serves the mission, it is time to change the governance model

How are governance and leadership related?

- governance is the framework within which leadership works to advance the mission of the church
- two types of leadership: institutional (by virtue of office) and charismatic (persuasive)
- often a governance model assigns tasks and duties to an office or position and then fill that office or position with someone who may not have the skills needed to be successful in the duties
- ideally, a church wants to match skills, gifts and charisma to the tasks of the mission; governance is the framework within which people operate with transparency and community understanding

Governance models help define structural roles. Are there informal roles as well?

- vision casters
- cheerleaders
- risk takers
- soothers
- "devil's advocate"
- strategic thinkers

How are governance and long range planning related?

- Ideally, you want to be using a governance structure that give maximum flexibility without sacrificing transparency and understanding
- Governance documents that need constant changing to accommodate emerging ministries, ideas and job descriptions are more constricting for mission than advancing
- Governance documents are not meant to articulate policy or job description, only relationships, lines of institutional authority and normative community operations.