

Growth Points

with Gary L. McIntosh, Ph.D.

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Church Board Affairs

The primary function of church boards is to provide governance to the church organization, represent it to the community, and accept the ultimate legal authority for it. While that statement covers a large amount of ground, the duties of board members can be summarized as follows.

First, it is the duty of board members to ensure the Christ-centeredness of the church. Churches are primarily local expressions of Christ's body. Board members must keep Christ at the center of everything that is done.

“Church board members should provide one of these things: wealth—bringing resources to bear on the needs at hand; work—serving in areas of expertise; or wisdom—providing spiritual leadership to the congregation.”

—Gary L. McIntosh

Second, it is the duty of board members to ensure that the church is carrying out its mission. By nature churches are missional, i.e., they are moving forward to accomplish Christ's work on earth. Board members are responsible to make sure the church is moving forward rather than backward.

Third, it is the duty of board members to establish management policies. This includes proper financial integrity, oversight of facilities, raising money, and regulation of personnel.

Fourth, it is the duty of board members to review, refine, approve, and track the church's strategic plan. Board members may not always initiate the development of the church's plan, but once it is approved, it is the member's duty to make sure it is fulfilled.

Fifth, it is the duty of the church board to support, protect, evaluate, and empower the lead pastor. Depending on the church's polity, it may also fall to the board to select and release the pastor when necessary.

Sixth, it is the duty of board members to give due diligence and attentiveness to their role. Among other things this means regular

attendance at board meetings, monitoring church programs and finances to make certain they comply with overall goals, values, and standard practices, and reviewing all information required for making sound decisions.

Seventh, it is the duty of board members to avoid self dealing. Board members must fully disclose any and all conflicts of interest (potential or actual) and recuse themselves or abstain from any and all voting where conflict of interest might be construed.

Other responsibilities of church board members include asking the tough questions, taking the long view, providing spiritual leadership, maintaining excellence, being a court of last resort for internal conflicts, keeping appropriate records, giving financially, working for the church, and providing wisdom as needed.

For information on scheduling Dr. Gary L. McIntosh

call toll free . . .
1-877-506-3086

e-mail . . .
cgnet@earthlink.net

write . . .
PO Box 892589
Temecula, CA 92589

The major requirement is trust.

A church must separate board functions from staff functions.

Board Functions and Staff Functions

The essential duties of board members remain the same regardless of the size of a church. Board members of large, medium, and small churches all have a duty to fulfill the basics of board governance.

There are, however, changes that must take place between board and staff functions as churches increase in size. Failure to make the right changes at the board level often causes a church to remain smaller than it could be.

Board members who serve in smaller churches often view their primary responsibility as that of making decisions on behalf of the congregation. Questions are brought to the church board so that decisions can be made regarding finances, programs, personnel, and a host of other issues. When a church is smaller, it is possible for members of a board to understand the entire church ministry well enough to gather one night a month and make good decisions concerning the church's overall ministry program.

As a church grows larger, it becomes increasingly difficult for members of church boards to make good decisions. The growing complexity of the church's program makes it more and more difficult for board members to grasp the issues and understand the total church ministry. In an effort to maintain decision-making control, church boards begin to meet more often and for longer periods of time in an effort to get their arms around the church and its needs.

If a church desires to grow larger, it is important to begin separating board functions from staff functions as soon as a multiple staff emerges. The board must become a policy-setting board rather than a decision-making board, while delegating day-to-day decisions to the staff.

Of course, church boards will always maintain some decision-making authority. Boards in

larger churches most often reserve the right to approve the total budget, indent the congregation for large amounts of money, hire and fire the senior pastor, approve key board members, and a number of other major areas of decision-making. However, if a board tries to keep decision-making authority over the staff, programming, and day-to-day management decisions, it will strangle the growth of the church.

For a church to grow, board members must entrust the day-to-day running of the church to the paid staff, while establishing general policies within which the staff functions. For example, a board may approve the financial budget (policy), but as long as staff work within the budget, they have the freedom to invest the resources as they see fit without further board approval. The staff members report to the lead pastor who holds them accountable. The lead pastor reports to the board members who hold him accountable.

The major requirement for a church board and staff to work well together is trust. Board members must trust the staff and release them to equip the saints for the work of service. Staff members must trust the board not to micromanage the process. If this happens, a church has a good change to grow.



Gary L. McIntosh, D.Min., Ph.D. is
President of the Church Growth Network

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