

Leadership without Elders

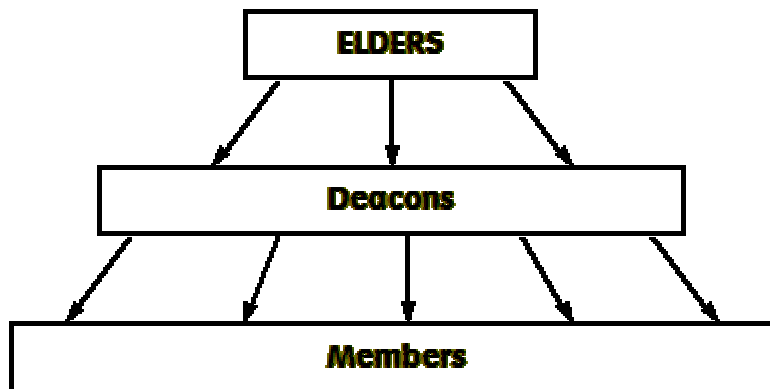
I. Remember it is God's plan for churches to have leadership

- A. The leadership should be strong and sound
- B. There are definite observable standards outlined in scripture
- C. There is no substitute for God's plan (churches without elders are "lacking")
 - 1. Any substitute should be understood to be merely a temporary one
 - 2. Any arrangements should accomplish these things:
 - a. They should help develop leaders
 - b. It should be the most effective until elders are installed
- D. This is not a matter of what is scriptural or unscriptural, but non-scriptural
 - 1. Aside from the eldership, God has not specified what kind of leadership to have
 - 2. The ideal then is to have an arrangement that works best for the sake of the church

II. Without Elders, what should be done for leadership?

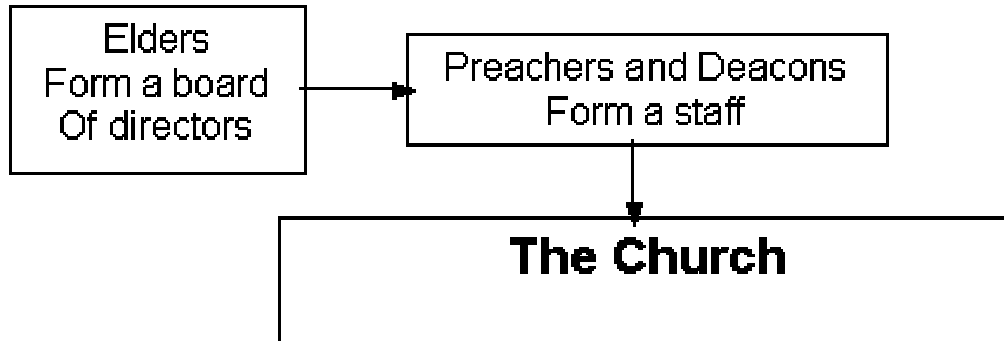
- A. Even though a church may not have elders YET, it still needs acceptable leadership
- B. First have to make sure you understand the Biblical Concept of leadership before you can have the best possible "temporary" arrangement
- C. The way church organization has been understood and practiced:
(note: The following models have been suggested by James Gibbs, an elder of the North County church of Christ in Escondido, CA. He observed that there are 3 models for leadership commonly adopted in various churches.)

1. The Pyramid Model:



- a. All decisions will be made at the top
- b. The key for this system to work is strong authority at the top
- c. The group at the top of the pyramid will only be large enough to satisfy the requirement for a plurality, but stay small so as to make decisions easily
- d. A hierarchy will develop recognizing a “chain of command”
- e. There will be little feedback from the church because decisions are made at the top of the pyramid
- d. Because of strong sense of hierarchical authority, all matters of Biblical Interpretation will be determined by the top of the pyramid. Any contrasting view of truth by a member will be regarded as rebellion.
- e. The top will regard submission of subordinates of primary importance. The chain of command will be clear and must be adhered to
- f. Because of the chain of command, deacons are viewed as “junior elders”
- g. Because of the tightness of this type of an organization, it will always be possible to say that there is unity.

2. Common Corporation Model



- a. The board of directors determines policies and matters that affect the entire corporation. Their primary function is to make decisions
- b. The daily administration of the corporation is handled by the "staff"
- c. The teaching role is usually delegated to the staff
- d. Day to day counseling activities are also delegated to the staff
- e. Most of what the board of directors do is behind closed board room doors. As a result, the board is removed from the church and very little feedback is heard from the rest of the church.
- f. Most, if not all of the work (evangelism, counseling, teaching, etc.) will be delegated to the professionals in the staff or to members.

3. The Servant Leadership Model (biblical)



- a. A picture is worth a thousand words. The picture in scripture offered for leadership in the church is not a pyramid, but a shepherd with the church as the sheepfold. Consider all the terms used for elders:
- 1) Elder - An older man, suggesting wisdom & father figure
 - 2) Overseer - A guardian, one who cares for the church
 - 3) Shepherd - One who is among the people, protects, builds up, feeds, inspects, cares for, and even lays down his life
- b. It will have a “genuine” plurality of elders. Since this is a work oriented model, and since every sheep needs a shepherd, it is desirable to have as many as are qualified serving in this role.
- c. While it is true that decision come more slowly for a large group of men, many counselors will produce better decisions. Although elders meet and make decisions, that is not their primary function in the shepherding model.
- d. Because Biblical leaders are not “lords” but shepherds, they have a lower profile than in other models for leadership.
- 1) The letters are no addressed to elders to be handed down to the church
 - 2) When leaders are included in the address, it says “to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons” (Phil 1:1)
 - 3) Of the many men who are mentioned by name by Paul in his letter, we have no idea as to which, if

any, were elders. They were not elevated, they were “among” the sheep

- 4) Was was the case of the leaders in Jerusalem (Acts 6), a large part of leadership focus is on prayer and ministry of the word

III. The Men’s Open Monthly Business Meeting

A. For some reason, in the absence of elders, we think that this is the Biblical way. It has become a tradition and has been passed down. Aside from the preacher being the sole leader, this is perhaps the worst way to handle leadership.

B. Reasons why this does not work well:

(note: these reasons are offered by Jack Exum in his book on leadership)

1. It is immobile, it is monthly. Often items of importance have to wait 29 days.
2. There is a different group that meets each month. Some were present last month, some are absent this month, and vice-versa. Whatever was done last month has to be re-hashed.
3. There is generally no agenda. This indicates little or no preparation. Without forethought and groundwork there is little else left but to (1) read the minutes of the last meeting; (all in favor say yea). Read the treasurers report (sighs are heard in the background), all in favor, etc.

“Now let’s go around the room and see if anybody has any new business.”

“What about you Charlie?”

“No, not this month.”

“How about you Sam?”

“Nope!”

“What about you Fred?”

... and on it goes. What generally happens is, petty grievances are aired, discontents are voiced, the toilet needs fixing, where are we going to put the new mailbox and what can be done about the auditorium overheating. Occasionally someone will say, “Hey, why don’t we...” and commences with an idea that from the start is ill-conceived. It wasn’t thought out fully, it was a spur of the moment thing. Opposition occurs, feelings get hurt, and a sullen quiet settles over the group. Amen is said and everyone goes home, relieved that it’s finally over.

4. The meeting is often a “soapbox” for any hot-head in the group. It’s an open invitation for a brother to spill his rancor, voice his bitterness, incite a riot. Brethren have been known to come to physical blows at such meetings. Babes in Christ are often exposed to running feuds, and a verbal “shoot-out at the O.K. Corral.” Give a platform to a hot-head and you deserve what you get
5. Suggestions are forwarded and decision often made, right on the spot, without thought or planning. Precedents are set, wheel put in motions, works begun that are never finished.
6. This system of governing encourages lobbying and politicking outside of the meeting itself. Counting votes, running tallies, lining up sides. It’s just the way it works.
7. Differences are hard to handle in an open forum. Pride is present, the winner smiles, the loser sulks. Our side wins and your side loses. this type of fussing is hard to heal. Petty hurts are long remembered. Vendettas are not unheard of. All over “just the way we do our business.”
8. This keeps a congregation unstable, uneasy, unsettled. No one really knows what’s going to happen next. the men’s business meeting may be the most “exciting” thing that happens each month. Who can grow in such an atmosphere?

C. Other Problems with Men’s Business Meetings as a “temporary” arrangement for leadership

1. It is not concerned with “real” leadership (ei. shepherding), but more closely resembles the Common Corporation Model or the Pyramid Model instead of the Servant Leadership model
2. There are often no standards. There are definite observable standards for the leadership of a church in its elders. Yet usually when it comes to Men’s Business Meetings, all that is required are two things: (1) You have to be a Male (2) You have to be a Baptized Believer. Just because you have no qualified elders means you just ignore the rest of God’s standards for leadership (that would be like saying, “I only have \$99 to pay the \$100 I owe. Since I don’t have it, I’ll just pay \$2)
3. Men’s Business Meetings are usually concerned more with Management and Organization rather than Leadership. You don’t “manage” people, (you manage programs, facilities, etc.)

you lead people. Leaders weaned on this system will probably be “management” elders instead of “shepherd” elders.

IV. A Suggestion (note: This is a mixture of suggestions from various sources, but largely from Jack Exum’s book on leadership)

- A. Begin with prayer (and fasting?)
- B. Start by studying the Biblical Doctrine of Leaders (ei. Elders)
- C. Before implementing a “temporary” arrangement, determine what your goals for the arrangement are
 1. Spiritual leadership, shepherding?
 2. Train and encouraging those with aspirations of leadership?
 3. How long will these serve?
- D. Involve the congregation in selecting a leadership committee, or committees in general
 1. If this is a general leadership committee, the preacher should be on it
 2. Determine the number you need
 3. List all the men in the congregation on a list
 4. Have each member of the congregation number in order the most spiritually developed and mature men of the congregation, beginning with one on down to the number you have decided you need
 5. Tally them up before the congregation (nothing left to chance)
 6. Ask each if they would serve on a leadership committee
- E. If you have an installation service, have the committee stand before the congregation and receive the charge of leadership and be formally “appointed”
- F. As far as the monthly men’s business meetings, you can still have them and they can still be open, but voting and such would be done by the leadership committee in whom the congregation has entrusted

leadership to based on SPIRITUAL standards.

V. Advantages of the elected committee system

- A. The best in the congregation are selected
- B. It brings peace and order to the congregation and allows leadership to lead
- C. The Committee can meet at any time. They can confer on the phone, leave notes for each other etc. Necessary meetings are held with purpose & progress
- D. Church discipline can be administered with more loving care and discretion
- E. A committee is free to move ahead to make necessary decisions that relate to their work without road blocks or bottle necks.
- F. Majority vote of the wisest prevails.
- G. Reports to the rest of the congregation are made from time to time on plans and progress. Feedback on a regular basis

Remember that these are suggestions. In the absence of elders, it should be remembered that there are still Biblical standards for leadership. Instead of throwing them out, determine the standards that you cannot do without and apply them. Only the most qualified men with good upstanding character that displays spiritual maturity should be considered. This is temporary and should be understood to be a move toward God's ideal, shepherds for the sheep. This temporary arrangement should also encourage the development of leaders.

Even after the installment of elders, the development of leaders should be a never-ending process.