

A F R I C A  
T H E O L O G Y  
S E R I E S

## **CHURCH ADMINISTRATION**

Towards the Mission of God



Ronnie Davis  
Godfrey Harold

“Essential reading for anyone in church leadership. This book demystifies the day-to-day administrative burdens of a congregation, allowing pastoral teams to confidently focus their energy on spiritual growth and community impact. This book bridges the gap between sacred calling and practical management, providing church leaders with the tools needed to safeguard resources and optimize their ministries.”

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“Throughout my tenure as Principal of the Baptist Convention College and as General Secretary of the Baptist Convention of South Africa, I have recognized the critical role that administration plays within ministry. Despite its significance, Church Administration is often marginalised, both as a discipline and a practical function in church operations and mission. This resource, authored by Ronnie Davis and Godfrey Harold, offers an in-depth examination of the relevance of Church Administration to ministry and the church's broader mission. This comprehensive work provides valuable insights for all individuals engaged in the service and mission of Jesus Christ.”

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“Davis and Harold present the task of stewarding God's people and resources within a broader narrative of a biblical theology of administration, from creation to redemption. They provide a strong scriptural foundation of administration within the unique identity of the Church. It is a remarkable work, establishing Church Administration as ‘Missional Ministry’ in God's divine plan within the context of African leadership, using the Christological model of servanthood. The piece is an appropriate text book for students training for the ministry and a must-read not only for all Church leaders and administrators but also for students of comparative religions, for whom the appendices provide distinct administrative structures that have emerged over the years and have been shaped by specific faith convictions”

**John K. Jusu**, Mesa Global - Theological Education Consultant (Anglophone Africa).



# CHURCH ADMINISTRATION: Towards the Mission of God

Ronnie Davis  
Godfrey Harold



NIAMEY : NIGER

*CHURCH ADMINISTRATION: Towards the Mission of God*  
Africa Theology Series

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The Africa Theology Series is a multi-volume series of books on Christian Theology. Unlike a typical systematic theology, each book in this series is a stand alone volume on a specific topic or doctrine. Also, unlike a traditional systematic theology, this series expands the scope to include biblical, systematic and applied theology. The goal is to give the African church a biblically faithful and contextually appropriate tool to help them, as Jude 3 states, “Contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”

Briefly introducing such a comprehensive work like the Africa Theology Series poses quite a challenge which is why an entire separate volume is devoted to introducing the series. In that first and key volume, the reader is provided with a foundation for all the subsequent volumes. This introductory volume explains the uniqueness of this series and explore baseline understandings of key components in the series. The introductory volume covers the contextual emphasis, the hermeneutical grounding and the theological framework for this series.

Therefore, the purpose of this brief introduction is neither an attempt to replicate nor replace the Introductory volume. To truly benefit from this series, one must start with that foundational volume.

Instead, this brief introduction is provided to explain four underlying goals for this series. Understanding these goals will help the reader gain the most insight when reading each separate volume. These goals are:

- Bridging knowledge with action
- Interacting with major faith systems
- Moving from defense to offense
- Creating a readable and helpful resource

## **Know, Be, Do: Bridging Knowledge with Action**

Each volume in the Africa Theology Series seeks to move the reader from theological foundations (Know) to cultural implications (Be) then finally to practical applications (Do). In the African context, the concrete is much more impactful than the theoretical. In fact, oftentimes grievous errors in the pulpit or in pastoral practice come from those who can articulate the great doctrines of the faith both eloquently and sufficiently. These men often hold degrees from theological institutions

where they were trained in sound doctrine and biblical orthodoxy. In other words, the errors that seem to plague the African church aren't necessarily from a lack of knowledge but rather from a lack of application of that knowledge into practice.

A short-sighted overcorrection would be to throw out knowledge-based teaching and instead simply focus on obedience-based action. However, this would be just as dangerous and ultimately counter-productive to healthy church. Orthodoxy and orthopraxy are not against one another but rather two sides of the same coin. To have one without the other is not only incomplete but insufficient to build a biblically faithful and missions minded church.

The Africa Theology Series addresses these challenges by helping the pastor or church leader see the interconnectedness of knowledge and action. There is an African proverb that says, "Two hands wash one another." We need both knowledge and obedience. Therefore, each volume will, in its own unique way, lay a theological foundation for the specific doctrine being addressed as the authors seek to answer the question, "What should I know?"

The reader will then be challenged to see how this knowledge (what I know) necessarily informs identity (who I am). Every culture has elements that the Bible can affirm and appreciate and also elements the Bible condemns and corrects. Seeing your culture and your worldview through the Biblical lens is a painful but necessary step. In fact, this step of transformed hearts is the bridge needed on the path from transformed minds to transformed actions. The authors will challenge the reader to think deeply and introspectively about the cultural implications of doctrine as they seek to answer the question, "Who should I be?"

After knowledge and being comes doing. This is where information gets to work. Sound doctrine is not merely for the academic minded nor should it be reserved only for the seminary classroom. Instead, right doctrine must be applied and spill over into right practice. The authors of each volume will assist the reader in understanding the practical application of the doctrine in their lives as they answer the final question, "What should I do?"

The following statement provides a short summation of this goal:

**KNOWLEDGE** *informs* **BEING** *which drives* **DOING**

## **My Neighbor's Faith: Interacting with Major Faith Systems**

Another unique feature of the Africa Theology Series involves interaction with other major worldviews/religions. Africa is a very religious place where atheists are few and far between. Whereas books from the West might lean more into apologetical arguments aimed at skeptics, this series looks to interact with the other major faith systems on the continent.

While there are obviously outliers, the majority of Africans fall into one of several religious categories. These categories are much more diverse than a simplistic designation and are oftentimes complex combinations of two distinct categories into one. One such example would be the syncretization of two distinct categories (Islam and ATR) into one faith system (Folk Islam).

Practically this means that two Muslim men from the same tribe and living in the same city might have drastically different understandings of their faith. This also implies that some who would claim to be Evangelical Christians actually practice a much more animistic faith. These nuances and caveats are real and rampant but beyond the scope of this series, which will examine only the orthodox positions of each faith system.

However, the problem of neatly labeling categories becomes even more challenging due to the ambiguous nature of African Traditional Religion (ATR). There is no such thing as THE African Traditional Religion with an agreed upon set of beliefs. Instead, ATR is a large designation for those who would cling to an animistic faith ranging from voodoo to ancestral worship and everything in between.

It would be impossible to try and interact with every potential version of each faith system. However, it is incredibly important to understand the basic tenets (even if not held by everyone in the same way) of the major faith systems on the continent. In other words, it is helpful to know what an “average” Muslim believes about the doctrine of God and how that’s different than the Evangelical Christian. Therefore, each volume in this series will provide side-by-side comparisons to highlight major differences between Evangelical Christians and these other religious systems.

## **Changing Tactics: Moving from Defense to Offense**

There is an anecdotal account of how those working to detect counterfeit currency spend their time only examining real currency. The story

is used to illustrate the importance of focusing time and energy studying the truth instead of spending time dealing with falsehoods. While this is a point worth noting and we would agree that knowing the truth is of utmost importance, we also believe it is a good and biblical practice to expose falsehoods.

The Africa Theology Series adopts an offensive standpoint instead of choosing to play defense alone. Far from being done in a mean-spirited fashion, each volume takes pastoral care to warn the flock of the dangers of false doctrines currently wreaking havoc on the African Church.

The prosperity gospel and many practices in Neo-pentecostalism pose an even greater threat to healthy church and missions advance than Islam or ATR. Throughout the New Testament there is a constant warning of dangers that arise from wolves pretending to be sheep. These dangers are especially devastating because they come from within the church. Paul tells the church in Corinth of a tactic of Satan wherein he disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).

Any good shepherd knows he is responsible to care for his flock. This means two things practically: one, he must provide for them by leading them to grazing grounds and sources of water; secondly, and just as important, he must protect them by keeping them from dangers which seek to harm the flock.

In the same way pastors must provide and protect their flocks. They must lead their people to the green pastures of God's Word and to drink from the Living Water of knowing Christ. However, pastors must be able to defend their flock and protect them from enemies who would seek to destroy and harm.

Each volume will seek to expose the various errors and dangerous ways of prosperity teachers and Neo-pentecostal practitioners. The authors will show how these false teachers twist and misuse the Scriptures and, therefore, confuse various key doctrines. The hope, then, is that these volumes will help pastors and church leaders protect both themselves and their flocks by nurturing a spirit of discernment that can detect and expose unbiblical teaching and practices.

### **Short and Simple: Creating a Readable and Helpful Resource**

The American author Mark Twain once said, "I'm sorry this letter is so long. I did not have time to write a short one." In this quote Twain

reveals a common misconception that the more words that are spoken (or typed) then the better the content. While it is true that sometimes exhaustive explanations are necessary, the reality is most subjects can be sufficiently and succinctly explained without endless words.

The volumes in the Africa Theology Series are intentionally short and written in a way to be accessible to the largest audience of readers. The shortness comes from a ruthless approach to writing that seeks to explain the most significant truths with the fewest amount of words in the simplest way possible.

The goal is to create a resource that is readable and helpful. The authors seek to use story, dialog, proverbs, concrete examples, and other illustrious words to help complicated doctrines become understandable and applicable. Each volume also includes quick access reference guides for comparative charts on the various beliefs of each faith system.

### **The Journey Ahead**

There is an African proverb that says, “A baby on its mother's back doesn't know the journey is long.” Everyone, to some level, has benefited from the hard work of others. Teachers, pastors, theologians, authors, professors, parents, and myriads of others have suffered greatly to carry us along. We are where we are today because of their sacrifice.

The volumes in the Africa Theology Series have come about because many men who have many responsibilities deemed it worthy to set aside time to create the resource you now hold in your hand. These resources are the result of countless hours of work so that the African church might grow in her faithfulness to the task. Our hope is that their sacrifice “carries” you along in your faith journey.

Mark Phillips  
Series editor



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## CHAPTER 1

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### INTRODUCTION

For most people, the word “administration” doesn’t usually produce a feeling of excitement. Similarly, when faced with administrative tasks, the challenge can be seen as mundane or tedious. For many pastors, the role of church administration is pushed aside in favor of “more important” pastoral tasks. Nevertheless, administration is an integral part of a healthy and vibrant ministry. Further, the stewardship of administration is a godly calling and task. God should be seen as the great administrator and one who moves and acts in an ordered fashion. In Isaiah 28:23-29, the Holy Spirit provides an interesting passage of “wonderful advice” in between daunting oracles of judgment:

*Listen and hear my voice. Pay attention and hear what I say. Does the plowman plow every day to plant seed? Does he continuously break up and cultivate the soil? When he has leveled its surface, does he not then scatter cumin and sow black cumin? He plants wheat in rows and barley in plots, with spelt as their border. His God teaches him order; He instructs him. Certainly black cumin is not threshed with a threshing board, and a cart wheel is not rolled over the cumin. But black cumin is beaten out with a stick, and cumin with a rod. Bread grain is crushed, but is not threshed endlessly. Though the wheel of the farmer’s cart rumbles, his horses do not crush it. This also comes from the LORD of Hosts. He gives wonderful advice; He gives great wisdom.*

Consider the advice to be gleaned from this wisdom of the farmer. First, one doesn’t continue to do the same task needlessly—the farmer doesn’t plow the land daily. Second, each challenge is approached dif-

ferently according to the need. Various crops require different approaches to planting (scattering for cumin, rows for wheat, and plots for barley) and for harvesting (threshing board, cart wheels, beating). Third, one can rightfully expect a progression as each action has consequence that occur in some sequence—preparing the land, sowing, harvesting. While these statements seem like “common sense,” God labels them “wonderful advice” and “great wisdom.” God teaches order. As an orderliness exists in creation, one can rightly expect some predictability of consequence and sequence for actions. To experience the greatest harvest, one must plan accordingly in the earlier stages of plowing and planting. This “great wisdom” moves beyond the farmer. In the immediate context of Isaiah, it is applied to the expectation of God’s actions in response to the actions of God’s people. In the larger context, this advice provides counsel for expectant planning that is at the heart of administration.

In this volume of the Africa Theology Series, Church Administration will be examined in two broad sections. The first part of this volume relates the foundational understanding for a Theology of Church Administration. To accomplish this task, four aspects of administration are considered. First, the task of administration will be examined through a Biblical theological lens as Scripture is the authoritative revelation of God. Further, the “organized” nature of the church will be considered. Thirdly, a philosophy of administration for the Christian minister will be unpacked. Finally, servant leadership will be defined and explained. The second part of this volume will examine the Practice of Administration for the Christian minister. The integral topics of the dynamics of administration, biblical peace-making, and a model for the implementation of servant leadership in sub-Saharan Africa will be provided. Three appendices are included to aid in the application of Church Administration in sub-Saharan Africa. The first appendix provides a comparative study for Baptists of leadership structures and styles prominent in other religious worldviews across the continent: African Traditional Religions, Neo-Pentecostal/Prosperity churches, the Roman Catholic Church, and Islam. The final two appendices are practical guides for leading a church business meeting and budgeting finances in the local church, respectively.

Before one can launch into the task of developing a theology of administration, some preliminary terms and ideas need to be defined as an introduction to the topic. First, some critical characteristics of administration as illustrated in Scripture must be established. Second, the intersection with ministry and administration needs to be declared clearly. Finally, a working definition of church administration must be developed.

## FOUNDATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ADMINISTRATION

A healthy view of administration begins with an examination of the task through the testimony of Scripture. While a more thorough consideration of the biblical foundation is the focus of the next chapter, one can identify several characteristics of administration illustrated in the Bible. Welch identifies eight primary characteristics to be considered.<sup>1</sup>

The first characteristic that is critical to grasp is that the discipline of administration is essentially a spiritual task.<sup>2</sup> In 2 Corinthians 9:12-15, the Holy Spirit through Paul establishes this truth:

*For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many acts of thanksgiving to God. Through the proof of this service, they will glorify God for your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with the and with others. And in their prayers for you they will have deep affection for you because of the surpassing grace of God on you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift.*

In this passage, several truths are provided. Service ministry is connected to the act of thanksgiving. Further, the end goal is the glorification of God through all service rendered and the obedience to the gospel. Most importantly, such ministry is described as a result of God's grace and gifting. Taken together, one must recognize that the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Welch, *Church Administration: Creating Efficiency for Effective Ministry*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

*purpose* of administration is derived from the purpose of God: administration is a gifting empowered by the Holy Spirit for the propagation of the gospel of Christ unto the glory of God.

A second truth found in Scripture is that administration is about the totality of the minister's task.<sup>3</sup> In Titus 1:5-9, Titus is instructed to appoint elders in each town. These elders are expected to serve as "God's managers" (v. 7) while living a life guided by the gospel message. Further, these managers are held responsible for a full range of ministry including the encouragement of believers, teaching of doctrine, and defending the faith against those who would contradict it (v. 9).

The skilled worker is a direct result of the study of Scripture.<sup>4</sup> The worker is commanded to be diligent in study so that one "doesn't need to be ashamed, correctly handling the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). There is an understanding that one is not static in ministry; rather, one grows in knowledge and skill through the study and application of Scripture.

A fourth assertion made by Welch is that administration is an art to be practiced.<sup>5</sup> In James 2:14-18, the Holy Spirit explains that faith must be evidenced in one's life. Works are to be enacted from one's faith. Ministry, then, can never be viewed as an abstract exercise. To this end, the skill of administration is intimately connected to the living out of faith and ministry.

The focus of administration, however, is not the process of ministry as much as it is the engagement with people.<sup>6</sup> This truth is illustrated well in the "parable of the body" found in 1 Corinthians 12. The church as the body of Christ is made up of many parts moving in relationship to one another. While the process of ministry is important, it is the coordination of the people of God as the real task that bears fruit.

Similarly, one must understand that administration is essentially grounded in the understanding of an orderly process to the life and ministry of the church.<sup>7</sup> The Holy Spirit led Paul to confront difficulties that arose in the Corinthian church, especially the disruption and

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

confusion in worship and ministry. After a lengthy discussion around the exercising of spiritual gifts in church meetings in 14:26-40, the self-centred practice of spiritual gifts is condemned; rather, a final, simple pronouncement is given as guidance: “But everything must be done decently and in order” (vs. 40). A clear expectation of the administrative task is to help establish an orderly process to ministry.

Welch also suggests that administration is a means of preserving peace within the church body.<sup>8</sup> A great illustration is found in 1 Corinthians 8:7-13 where the Holy Spirit led Paul to provide instructions for the congregation to maintain unity in the face of disagreements over cultural practices. In this case, the church was divided over the practice of eating meat that was purchased in the marketplace—where it had first been offered to an idol. Paul provides clear instruction for the responsibility of believers to one another and direction on how to move forward in unity.

A final observation made by Welch concerning the task of administration is that administration produces fellowship.<sup>9</sup> The early church in Acts provides a good illustration as the apostles appoint deacons to help with ministry resulting in a greater unity and fellowship between the diaspora Jews and the Judean Jews. The challenge of understanding the points of conflict and devising a plan to address such conflict is an administrative task.

In addition to Welch’s observations about administration, a foundational idea must be understood. Namely, the administrative task is most closely aligned with the idea of stewardship. While this concept will be considered more fully in the next chapter, stewardship provides the essential starting point for any discussion on administration. Two critical ideas develop from this perspective. First, God is the source of ministry and the founder of the church. Second, the Christian moves and serves at the direction of God. The implications for administration, then, is that as God has established His mission for His people, the administrative task, as a stewardship task, has its primary focus the administration of the mission of God in the context of the local church.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

## THE INTERSECTION OF ADMINISTRATION AND MINISTRY

The topic at hand is not simply “administration” as an abstract principle; rather, the focus of study is on administration in connection to ministry—and most importantly ministry within the context of the local church. As the New Testament is the primary source for descriptions of ministry and service within the local church, three terms for ministry or service used in the New Testament provide helpful insight into the points of connection for administration and ministry.

The first term for consideration is *doulos* which was the most common term for slave or servant. Within Greek culture, the term was not given great respect as the concept of freedom was a primary concern. Indeed, one found “personal dignity in the fact that he is free.”<sup>10</sup> While one was expected to render service to the larger community as a good citizen, the Greek citizen would “reject and scorn the type of service which... bears even the slightest resemblance to that of the slave.”<sup>11</sup> The only exception seemed to be in matters of law. For the Greco-Roman culture, the term, *doulos*, was never used in connection to religious service until the influence of eastern religions.<sup>12</sup> It is in the Jewish context, however, that one finds the significant development of the idea of “slave” or “servant” in connection with religious ceremony “to describe the relationship of dependence and service in which [humanity] stands to God... the sharpest possible antithesis to that of the Greek and Hellenistic world.”<sup>13</sup> This latter idea becomes a dominant feature within the New Testament usage of the term. The Holy Spirit highlights this truth in Romans 6 with the understanding that one is “liberated from sin and become enslaved to God” (Rom. 6:22). Within the New Testament, the term is never spoken in a negative or disparaging tone. As a result, slaves were integrated into the community without hesitation. More important, however, is the understanding that Christians viewed themselves as the *douloi* (servants) of

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<sup>10</sup> Karl H. Rengstorff, “*doulos*,” in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume ii*, G. Kittel, ed. G. Bromiley, trans. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1964), p. 261.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 262.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

Christ! The meaning is quite clear—the Christian belongs to God as a servant belongs to a master. Furthermore, this relationship is established through the redemptive work of Christ. A goal of redemption, then, is not personal autonomy—the freedom to do whatever one desires; rather, the call is for obedience!<sup>14</sup> This truth does not contradict the reality that those rescued from sin are also children of God. The idea conveyed, rather, is that such privilege assumes a position of service out of worship and gratitude to God. Several of the New Testament writers will use the term as a self-designation which is significant. The idea is that one is a “bond servant” or a servant by choice. One submits to the Lordship of Christ willingly and servant became seen almost as an office.<sup>15</sup> This understanding is probably based upon the teaching of Jesus in John 13 when Jesus takes on the role of servant and washes the feet of the disciples. The “office” of servant is given greater dignity and purpose in that moment. Paul will also use this term to describe his own attitude of service to others: “For although I am free from all people, I have made myself a slave to all, in order to win more people” (1 Corinthians 9:19). The concept of servant becomes a foundational idea for church administration. Ministry must never become the end itself; rather, the means of faithful service to God which is lived out in ministry to others.

A second important term about service that is found in the New Testament is “*leitourgos*.” Within both the Greco-Roman and the Jewish cultures, the term was seen as a more technical term for the ministry of priests. While the term was loosely used to describe some aspects of civil service within Greek communities,<sup>16</sup> the overwhelming usage was in connection with the leading of temple service (the term “liturgy” derives from this word). The Jewish community used the term primarily as a technical term for priestly service to God.<sup>17</sup> Within the New Testament, the term was given a broader use. Nevertheless, the term was still used of the planning and carrying out of specific acts of ministry. For example, the term was used to describe the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 276-277. See James 1:1 in particular.

<sup>16</sup> H. Strathmann, “*leitourgeo*,” in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume iv*, G. Kittel, ed. G. Bromiley, trans. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1967), p.217.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 220-222.

Antioch: “As they were ministering<sup>18</sup> to the Lord and fasting...” The idea of continued service rendered to God is the clear meaning. The term is also used of the Christians in Macedonia and Achaia who collected funds to help the Judean Christians: “...they are obligated to minister<sup>19</sup> to Jews in material needs” (Romans 15:27). Similarly, the noun form is used to describe the failure of Philippian church to aid Paul while in prison: “...what was lacking in your ministry<sup>20</sup> to me” (Philippians 2:30). The term conveys the expectation of service rendered in the worship of God. The service has some expectation of purpose and form.

The final term to be considered is a more direct term for “service” or “ministry” and captures well the intersection between ministry and administration. The term is *diakonos* from which the name “deacon” is derived. The term literally means “through the dirt” and indicates those who got their feet dirty serving others—the one who never had their feet washed at gatherings. While there is a lot of similarity in action to the previous terms, some distinction can be made as Beyer notes:

The concept of serving is expressed in Greek by many words which are often hard to differentiate even though each has its own basic emphasis. *Douleo* means to serve as a slave, with a stress on subjection... *Leitourgeo* denotes official public service to the people or to the state, being used... for service in the temple and in Christianity for service in the Church... As distinct from all these terms, *diakoneo* has the special quality of indicating very personally the service rendered to another...in *diakoneo* there is a stronger approximation to the concept of a service of love.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The present active participle form of the word (*leitourgounton*) emphasizing an ongoing practice.

<sup>19</sup> The Aorist Active Infinitive is used to emphasize the purposeful actions that were for a specific task.

<sup>20</sup> The noun is used to describe some form of formal or assumed actions connected to one’s relationship with God.

<sup>21</sup> Hermann W. Beyer, “*diakoneo*.” In *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume ii*, G. Kittel, ed. G. Bromiley, trans. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1964), p. 81.

The first usage in the New Testament is with the original sense of “waiting tables”<sup>22</sup> or “supervising the meal.”<sup>23</sup> The need for the latter service prompts the setting aside of the first deacons in Acts. The reference is not simply serving food but included “the daily preparation and organization.”<sup>24</sup> In the Acts narrative, the emphasis is upon “practical love rather than the proclamation of the Word.”<sup>25</sup> More specifically, the need for service to be rendered faithfully so that the apostles could continue with the ministry of teaching and preaching. As expected, one finds the term used in the context of the extending of hospitality to guests.<sup>26</sup> Jesus embodies the understanding of service in “many different activities such as giving food and drink, extending shelter, providing clothes and visiting the sick and prisoners.”<sup>27</sup> Beyer argues that this term in particular “comes to have the full sense of active Christian love for the neighbor and as such it is a mark of true discipleship of Jesus.”<sup>28</sup> The term is also applied to the apostles in Acts 1:17, 25.<sup>29</sup> The term does move into an “office” by the later New Testament. Beyer argues that the office becomes most closely connected to administrative tasks:<sup>30</sup>

That the primary task of deacons was one of administration and practical service may be deduced a) from the use of the term for table waiters and more generally for servants; b) from the qualities demanded of them; c) from their relationship to the bishop; and d) from what we read elsewhere in the NT concerning the gift and task of *diakonia*.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. See Luke 17:8 and John 12:2.

<sup>23</sup> See Acts 6:2.

<sup>24</sup> Beyer, p. 84. Beyer continues noting that the term “describes the men to whom this task was committed as organizers, dispensers, and overseers of meals.”

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 85. Martha is described in this manner for care of her guests (Luke 10:40) and Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:31). The word is even used of angels who ministered to Jesus after the temptation (Mark 1:13).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Acts 1:25 utilizes the phrase “apostolic service.”

<sup>30</sup> Beyer, p. 85.

The latter is understood primarily from the qualifications and expectations of deacons found in 1 Timothy 3:8-13.

The three terms provide some important foundation for any discussion of church administration. Church administration must include the understanding of volitional servanthood, ministerial order, and humble service. These dynamics provide a solid foundation from which one can begin to formulate a productive definition of church administration.

## **A WORKING DEFINITION OF CHURCH ADMINISTRATION**

With these dynamics in mind, one needs to formulate a definition of church administration to serve as a guide and boundary moving forward. Welsh provides an excellent definition of the task of administration as “the art and science of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling the work of others to achieve defined objectives and goals.”<sup>31</sup> Several important elements of this definition deserve to be explored. First, the declaration that administration is an “art” accurately acknowledges that administration calls upon individuals to develop and mature through learning, experience, and training, thus, developing abilities necessary to accomplish the work at hand. This process often involves some “trial and error” moments of experience but can also utilize the immediate application of learned skills. The “art” component is the learned skill of evaluation and adaptation. Nevertheless, Welsh is correct to describe administration as a “science” because administration calls for process, analysis, decisions, evaluations, and reports. The whole of the scientific model of application, evaluation, and modification is found in the administrative task. The successful administrator must have a good understanding of both the current state of affairs in a given local context as well as the optimum desired state. Further, the great administrator will be able to make decisions to help move from a current state to that optimum state. To this end, Welsh identifies four specific tasks in his definition: planning, organizing, leading, and controlling. Planning considers the futurity of circum-

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<sup>31</sup> Welsh, p. 13.

stances and the course of action necessary to achieve set objectives. Planning seeks to anticipate variables and decide upon actions to navigate the possibilities. Organizing draws together the human, physical, and fiscal resources into a cohesive element to achieve set objectives. The complexity of task is directly related to the number and types of variables. Leading is the supplying of direction to accomplish the task. It is never enough to be able to identify a plan, one must be able to communicate that plan effectively and lead others to follow. Controlling does not refer to the ability to manipulate others; rather, it is the ability to evaluate the process to ensure goals are achieved. In other words, control is the ability to keep “the main thing the main thing” and not become distracted in the process of administration. The final two aspects of this definition relate to the purpose of the organization: objectives and goals. Objectives are the overarching statement of mission of any organization while the goals become the elements established as necessary to meet those objectives.

While Welsh provides an excellent starting point for an understanding of the task of administration, this volume is focused on the placement of the task of administration within the context of the local church. Both elements of art and science can readily be applied to the local church as anyone who has had to navigate the challenge of recruiting, training, and deploying church members in the various ministries of the church can verify. Likewise, the tasks of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling are also easy to grasp in the context of the local church. The aspect that must be engaged further is the purpose of the organization. For the local church, the objectives and goals are ultimately determined not by the administrator or even the local congregation, but by God. Any discussions of objective or goal are quickly defined by God’s declarations in Scripture. Two perspectives are particularly crucial. First, the Christian must be engaged with the Father’s heart. In other words, the follower of Jesus—and the church by extension—must be passionate about the desires of God. The Holy Spirit leads Paul to encourage Timothy by reminding him that his life and actions are to please God “who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one mediator between God and man, a man, Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:4). Any discussion around the objectives of the church—more appropriately termed the “mission” of

the church, must keep at the forefront, God's desire which is the salvation of people and the declaration of the truth that there is only one God and only one mediator between God and humanity—Jesus Christ. The second crucial perspective is the final command of Jesus to his disciples found in Matthew 28:18-20: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Jesus provides a clear mandate to make disciples and qualifies that mandate with the admonition to go so that all nations are engaged. Further, he qualified the nature of disciple-making to include both bringing people to a point of faith and decision (baptizing them) and to train them to follow Jesus obediently (teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you). Any discussion of the mission of the church must reflect both the heart of the Father and the command of Jesus. One must recognize, however, that while the mission or objective does not change from church to church, the context of any given church does impact how that mission is fulfilled. Thus, the process of identifying and setting goals to meet this mission in the local context is best described as the "vision" of the local church. One of the tasks of a church administrator becomes the casting of vision to the local church so that it may fulfill the mission of God in its community for the glory of God.

How does one combine all of these elements into a coherent definition of "church administration"? Once again, the role of steward must surface as the most applicable "office" that corresponds to the calling of church administration. A definition that will serve as a foundation moving forward in this volume is:

Church Administration is the stewardship of God's resources for the faithful service of God's people rendered unto God and others on God's behalf to bring Him glory, build up His church, and reach the world in fulfillment of God's mission.

In this definition, several critical ideas are highlighted. The administrator as steward; God as the source of resources; expectation of service by all

of God's people; God as the author of the church's objectives; God's glory as the ultimate goal. In other words, church administration must be a God-centered enterprise!

## CONCLUSION

Administration is a godly, important use of time. As the leader moves to understand their role as a steward accountable to God and the truth that God is, indeed, the chief worker, one should experience both joy at joining God in the tasks and determination to be faithful in the tasks granted by God. The understanding that all the work of the church is to be Christocentric and God glorifying should create a healthy appreciation of the tasks of administration. In considering the role of church administration, Crabtree begins with a great reminder: "God ordains. He executes what He ordains. He is supreme in administration."<sup>32</sup> Over the next chapters, this idea of God-centered administration will be developed through both the defining of a theology of administration (part one of this volume) and the practice of administration (part two of this volume).

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<sup>32</sup> Sam Crabtree, "20 Verses for God-Centered Administrators," for *Desiring God* website, 13 November 2013. Accessed at <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/20-verses-for-god-centered-administrators> on 12 February 2022.



# **PART ONE**

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## A Theology of Church Administration





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## CHAPTER 2

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# **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS OF ADMINISTRATION**

With the proposed definition of church administration in focus,<sup>1</sup> one's attention can turn to the development of a theological understanding of church administration. In this volume, the task will be spread over three chapters with differing emphases: exploration of the biblical foundations for church administration to provide a baseline of understanding of administration, a systematic examination of church administration to provide a philosophy of administration, and an explanation of a model of church administration based upon the servant leadership of Jesus. Such a theological understanding of administration is critical in the development of a healthy approach to the task by the pastor and other ministers of the gospel.

In establishing a biblical witness for the topic of administration, this chapter will focus on two elements to provide some biblical foundation in developing a theological perspective of administration. First, a survey of administrative leadership through a biblical theology lens. While individual passages will be considered, the placement of administration within the broader narrative of Scripture provides an opportunity for a more concise yet effective survey. Second, a consideration of the biblical witness of the tension between organism and organization within the life of the church will be explored.

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<sup>1</sup> The definition provided in the introductory chapter: "Church Administration is the stewardship of God's resources for the faithful service of God's people rendered unto God and others on God's behalf to bring Him glory, build up His church, and reach the world in fulfillment of God's mission."

## A BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF ADMINISTRATION

Instead of providing a list of Bible passages that relate to some aspect of administration, a biblical theological framework provides a more strategic and profitable consideration. Morgan and Petersen provide a helpful definition of Biblical Theology:

The study of God’s unfolding story as it progresses from creation of the heavens and the earth, to the fall of our first parents into sin, to redemption in the person and work of Christ, and to his return, the final resurrection, and the new heavens and earth. This biblical story line reveals, frames, arranges, and links biblical teachings.<sup>2</sup>

Biblical theology affirms a connectedness to Scripture that not only reveals an unfolding narrative united around the redemptive work of God throughout history but also highlights that biblical teachings can be examined in light of the redemptive arc of the larger biblical story.<sup>3</sup> The four components of the metanarrative of Scripture—creation, fall, rescue,<sup>4</sup> and consummation—will serve as the basic structure for the bibli-

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, “Biblical Theology” in *A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), p. 17. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearch-bible.lifeway.com> on 05 December 2025.

<sup>3</sup> For further study, consider Ronnie Davis and Kennedy Mulenga, *Introduction to Biblical Theology* in the Africa Theology Series (Niamey, Niger: Axis Resources, 2020). Davis and Mulenga highlight three key components of biblical theology: the assertion of a progressive revelation of God in history (pp. 10-12), the affirmation of the need to consider the entire canon of Scripture (pp. 12-15), and the recognition of the redemptive work of God as the unifying theme of Scripture (pp. 15-16).

<sup>4</sup> Most often the term “Redemption” is used for the third element of the metanarrative. Spread Truth use the term “Rescue” in their evangelism training material (*The Story: Guide, Leaders Training* [Bloomington, IL: Spread Truth Publishing, 2011], see pp. 77-96 in particular. The authors have chosen to use “Rescue” over “Redemption” as the term better conveys to a contemporary audience both the helplessness of humanity and the grace of the saving activity of God.

cal investigation of the theme of administration. A concluding summary of some lessons gleaned will reflect a more systematic approach.

### **God's Design of Administration as Seen in Creation**

In the story of Creation found in the opening chapters of the Bible, an understanding of the divine establishment of administration is found in both the activity and mandates of God. As one moves through the days of creation, God establishes an ordered universe. Even the orderly pattern of the events of creation reflects a divine orderliness: light-water-land; light-water-land. The first three days recount the formation of creation in establishing light (day 1), separating waters above from waters below (day 2), and calling forth land from the midst of the waters (day 3). The second three days narrate the filling of these forms as God completes creation: the bodies of lights in the skies (day 4), the creatures that inhabit the waters and the birds of the air (day 5), the creatures that inhabit the land culminating in the creation of humanity (day 6). Even the establishment of a day of rest establishes a priority of God that will be critical in later worship for Israel. God's actions reveal intentionality, planning, and power. God moves purposefully according to His plans, fulfilling all that He desired to achieve. This reality is re-visited in Job 38-39 as God questions Job about Job's lack of understanding of the formation and oversight of creation. In the process of the questioning, God reveals a glimpse of the depth of His own activity in creating the earth<sup>5</sup> as well as His continued providence

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<sup>5</sup> God laid the foundation of the earth (38:4); marked off its dimensions (38:5); laid its cornerstone (38:6); set the boundaries of the sea (38:8-11); gave orders to the morning dawn guiding the revealing daylight (38:12-15); established the springs of the deep sea and the hidden expanses of the earth (38:16-18); knows and sets the abode of light and darkness (38:19-20); made storehouses for snow and hail, knows the origin of lightning and wind, makes the paths for rains and creates ice (38:22-30); established the constellations and created the laws of the heavens (38:31-34).

over all of creation.<sup>6</sup> God does not act haphazardly in His creative intentions, but with purpose and order.

Not only is the orderliness of God's administrative acts of creation witnessed in these opening chapters of the Bible, but God also established an administrative mandate (sometimes referred to as the Creation Mandate or the Cultural Mandate)<sup>7</sup> for humanity as a foundational stewardship. In Genesis 1:28, God blesses humanity and commands them to be fruitful and multiply and further commands them to subdue the earth, granting to them a dominion over the earth as stewards and administrators of creation.<sup>8</sup> This role is explained further in Genesis 2:15 when Adam is placed in the garden "to work it and keep it." God provides an initial calling for Adam—one that is administrative in nature requiring ongoing care, maintenance, and dominion enacted responsibly as stewards. These elements of care, maintenance, and dominion provide core elements for biblical administration. Two truths need to be highlighted from God's mandate to humanity. First, this divinely initiated stewardship role is as stewards, not owners. A steward is one who manages the property and affairs of another. Creation belongs to God; humanity was appointed to administer it on His behalf and for His glory. This principle is foundational for church administration: leaders do not own the church or its people but are stewards of

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<sup>6</sup> God describes his governance over elements such as calling forth rain (38:34) and lightning (38:35) as well as his intimate knowledge of creatures which God made, understands, and tends such as mountain goats (39:1-4), wild donkeys (39:5-8), wild oxen (39:9-12), ostrich (39:13-18), horses (39:19-25), hawks and eagles (39:26-30).

<sup>7</sup> Broadly speaking, this mandate includes all of the commands given in this passage: procreation, to reproduce and nurture life; cultivation, to tend and nurture the earth ensuring its well-being; dominion, to exercise authority over creation managing it responsibly; stewardship, serving as God's representatives reflecting His character and purpose in the world. For a brief survey on this mandate, see "What is the Creation or Cultural Mandate?" at [https://biblehub.com/q/what\\_is\\_the\\_cultural\\_mandate.htm](https://biblehub.com/q/what_is_the_cultural_mandate.htm) (accessed on 6 March 2026). Bible Hub notes that this mandate has been interpreted as the foundation for establishing a God-honoring culture and civilization (Ibid.).

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, this mandate is reiterated to Noah and his children (Gen. 9:1-3); thus, "Although sin had entered the world, this command to steward and cultivate remained." (Ibid.).

God's household, accountable to Him for their management of His resources and His flock. Second, work is a holy enterprise. Before the Fall, work—including the administrative work of naming the animals (Gen. 2:19-20) and tending the garden (Gen. 2:15)—was a good and holy activity. It was a primary means by which humanity could reflect the image of the working God and participate in His creative and sustaining purposes. Therefore, administration, in its purest form, is not a “necessary evil” but a sacred calling, a way to bring order, flourishing, and glory to God within a given sphere of responsibility.

From the beginning, one can understand that administration is not some human invention but is an essential part of God's design. Humanity is expected to manage, subdue, and sustain creation as stewards operating under God's sovereign rule to the glory of God. One could suggest that “Being created in God's image (Gen. 1:27) implies that humans reflect the Creator's nature by producing goodness, order, and purpose in the world.”<sup>9</sup>

### **The Impact of Sin on the Calling of Administration**

As the biblical narrative moves from Creation, one encounters the devastating reality of the fall of humanity. Adam and Eve's act of disobedience to God had dire consequences in which the harmony of the earlier chapters—harmony between God and humanity, between man and woman, and between humanity and creation—is impacted at every level. They are ashamed to be in the presence of God (Genesis 3:10) and are removed from the garden (Genesis 3:23). The relationship between Adam and Eve is changed (Genesis 3:16). Even the relationship between humanity and creation is altered (Genesis 3:17-19). Every aspect of human life is impacted by sin, and the call to steward and have dominion is likewise impacted. The entrance of sin into the world had a catastrophic impact on every aspect of existence, profoundly corrupting the divine intention for work, relationships, and stewardship. Understanding the effects of the Fall is essential for diagnosing the problems that plague all human organizations, including the church.

Consider three areas of life critical to administration that are significantly impacted by the reality of sin. First, the perception and expe-

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

rience of work have been profoundly changed. The curse pronounced in Genesis 3:17-19 transforms work from a joyful enterprise into toil. The ground now yields “thorns and thistles,” and humanity must eat “by the sweat of [the] face.” This reality applies directly to administration. What was intended to be the smooth implementation of God's wise order now becomes fraught with frustration, conflict, inefficiency, and resistance. Plans go awry, communication breaks down, and desired outcomes are achieved only through exhausting effort. Second, as mentioned above, sin shattered the perfect relationships of Eden. This reality creates fractures that complicate all administrative endeavors. Consider the implications of the broken Human-God relationship: Adam and Eve hid from God (Gen. 3:8), their communion replaced by fear and alienation. This vertical rupture is the root of all administrative dysfunction. When human leaders are alienated from the ultimate source of wisdom and authority, their own administration becomes self-serving, misguided, and prone to failure. They cease to act as faithful stewards and instead operate out of fear, pride, or rebellion. Similarly, the impact is felt within human relational dynamics. Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent (Gen. 3:12-13). This pattern of blame-shifting, self-preservation, and conflict becomes the default mode of human interaction. In an administrative context, this manifests as power struggles, office politics, gossip, envy, and a lack of trust—all of which poison organizational health and hinder the mission. One can also note a significant shift to the understanding of human-creation stewardship. The mandate to “have dominion” devolves from benevolent stewardship into either harsh exploitation or passive neglect. This same dynamic can be seen in how leaders manage organizational resources—whether people, finances, or facilities—using them for personal gain rather than for their intended purpose. Finally, beyond the creation narrative, the entire understanding of stewardship is impacted by sin. The fallen human heart rebels against the role of steward and seeks to be the owner. The desire “to be like God” (Gen. 3:5) is the desire to usurp His authority. Fallen leaders, therefore, are tempted to see their position as a right, their authority as absolute, and the people and resources under their care as possessions to be used for their own aggrandizement.

As the biblical narrative unfolds, one can see several examples of the sinful leadership. This reality manifests in several ways. First, the move to supplant God as the central point of life is noticed early. One of the more notable examples is the building of the Tower of Babel. Humanity works cooperatively seeking to challenge God—to reach the heavens and make a great name for themselves. The administrative gifts used to enlist, motivate, and oversee those working together become a misuse of stewardship granted to manage, subdue, and sustain creation for God's glory. This desire to replace God is seen in the misguided leadership of Jeroboam after he was appointed as King over the Northern Kingdom. His first act is to have idols of golden calves made and set up in Bethel and Dan as alternatives to worship at Jerusalem. Jeroboam goes so far as to claim that these idols were the gods that brought Israel out of Egypt—even using his leadership role to seek to appropriate God's saving work for Israel for his own purposes (1 Kings 12:25-30). He continued to mock the law of God by establishing new offerings and festivals as well (1 Kings 12:31-33). His actions resulted in a legacy of sin over the history of the Northern Kingdom.

Second, a quick survey of the Old Testament notes a systematic breakdown in understanding leadership. The book of Judges concludes with the haunting refrain: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). This summary is the definitive statement of administrative and social anarchy. Without submission to God's authority, human society descends into moral chaos, violence, and tribalism. It is a stark picture of a world devoid of godly administration. In truth, however, the institution of the monarchy, meant to provide stable leadership, largely failed to solve the problem because the kings themselves were fallen men. Even the highest example of the monarchy, David, called "a man after [God's] own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14), had his reign marred by profound administrative and moral failures. His abuse of power in the affair with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah (2 Sam. 11) brought disaster upon his family and the nation. His prideful census, an act of trusting in his own administrative strength rather than God, resulted in a devastating plague (2 Sam. 24). David's life shows that even the most gifted and godly leaders are susceptible to the corrupting influence of power. Beyond David, the history of Israel's and Judah's kings is a chronicle of

idolatry, injustice, and rebellion. From Solomon's spiritual compromise leading to the kingdom's division (1 Kings 11-12) to the wickedness of kings like Ahab and Manasseh, the record demonstrates that human leadership, apart from constant repentance and submission to God, inevitably fails. True success for a king was not defined by wealth or military might, but by his faithfulness in leading the people in the pure worship of God, a standard few met.

Another aspect of sinful leadership that can be observed is that of abuse against other peoples. Outside of Israel, one finds examples across the nations: Egyptians held the Jewish people in slavery for hundreds of years (see Exodus 1); in the opening oracle, Amos lists sins of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab (Amos 1:3-2:3). Israel and Judah both have examples of sin-impacted leadership.

Turning to the New Testament, Jesus directly addressed the fallen tendency of leaders to dominate. He told his disciples, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant" (Mark 10:42-44; see also Matthew 20:25). This radical subversion of the world's model of leadership is a direct critique of the administrative style born from the Fall. Although Jesus warns his disciples to avoid thinking of leadership as lording over others, the Fall's effects are not magically erased upon conversion. Paul's letters to the early churches are filled with corrections for administrative and relational failures: divisions and factions in Corinth (1 Cor. 1), arrogance and abuse of spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12-14), and leaders who "look out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 2:21). These problems necessitated apostolic intervention and the establishment of clear administrative guidelines and leadership qualifications. The New Testament provides further examples of sinful behavior within the church. From Annias and Sapphira lying about gifts given to the church (Acts 5) to the church of Corinth turning the Lord's Supper into self-centered feasts that excluded the poor (1 Corinthians 11:17-22). Most of the New Testament epistles include passages correcting behavior of Christians. The progression of sin impacts the perception of leadership; nevertheless, one also can see the impact of the redemptive work of God on the understanding of leadership and administration.

## **Administration and Leadership Restored by God**

Throughout the biblical narrative, God continues to engage with His people to rescue them from the impact of sin. Such redemptive work is also noted in the empowering of godly leadership. In the Old Testament one finds positive examples in both the individual and corporate setting. Joseph is one of the great examples of one dedicated to God who is gifted with administrative leadership. In Genesis 39:4-6, Joseph is entrusted by Potiphar to oversee “all that he had.” As an overseer, Joseph functions as a steward who manages Potiphar’s possessions, servants, and affairs. Ultimately, Joseph will serve in a similar role for Pharaoh (see Genesis 41:39-41). He will be placed in charge of the house of the Pharaoh and then elevated to second-in-command over Egypt. The example of Joseph reveals a couple of critical elements regarding leading: first, administration is not merely secular bureaucracy but often a divinely ordained stewardship; second, faithfulness and integrity matters as God raises and entrusts individuals with responsibility over resources and people.

One also finds examples of godly leadership and administration within the Old Testament in the leading of God’s people. Two examples are appropriate for this discussion. First, when faced with overwhelming demands of his time, Moses (on advice of his father-in-law) appoints capable, God-fearing, trustworthy men as “officials of thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens,” delegating authority and administration across Israel to meet both the judicial and governance needs of the people (Exodus 18:21-26). Second, David in his role as King established an organized civil administrative structure of officers, tribal leaders, census officials, civil servants, and advisors with defined roles so that the people of God could be governed in an orderly, structured manner (1 Chronicles 27:25-31). In a broader sense, the entire Levitical system of judges and administration of the law was a reminder that ultimately Israel had an identity beyond the monarchy defined by God in God’s laws. God’s people were not left to chaos, but given clear direction for structures to administer justice, provide social order, manage resources, and lead the people in the worship of God. Such provision reflects the divine character of holiness and order.

The New Testament provides clearer examples of the restoration of leadership and administration from the consequences of sin. While

one can find multiple examples, three areas of focus should be highlighted. First, the relationship between the gifts of the Holy Spirit and administration. In 1 Corinthians 12:28, administration (*kubernesis*) is included in the listing of spiritual gifts which includes such roles as apostle, prophet, teacher, and healer. The word used, *kubernesis*, literally refers to the act of steering a ship—a helmsman.<sup>10</sup> Beyer notes the significance of the inclusion of administration in this listing of those empowered by the Holy Spirit as indicating “the specific gifts which qualify a Christian to be a helmsman to his congregation, i.e., a true director of its order and therewith of its life... The importance of the helmsman increases in a time of storm... No society can exist without some order and direction. It is the grace of God to give gifts which equip for government.”<sup>11</sup> Administration, then, was never intended to be viewed as strictly secular work, but a Spirit-given gift for the building up of the church! In other words, the Holy Spirit declares that some believers are specially gifted to manage, organize, and sustain the work of the church. Administration in the NT church is not accidental or even optional—it's a divinely gifted ministry! This truth affirms that church health requires practical, administrative gifts for order, coordination, and oversight operating in conjunction with other gifts in the church. Administration provides order, structure, and vision so that the church can serve effectively as it fulfills the mission of God to the glory of God. Second, the evidence of the spiritual gift of administration is noted in the acts of delegation by the leaders of the early church. In Acts 6:1-4, the apostles appointed deacons to take responsibility for practical ministry so that the apostles could fulfill their role. This pattern of delegation and administrative order is essential for the health

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<sup>10</sup> Hermann Wolfgang Beyer, “*kubernesis*,” in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume iii, G. Kittel, ed. G. Bromley, trans. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965), p. 1035.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 1036. Beyer does make a distinction with other gifts listed based on 1 Corinthians 12:29 where Paul asks whether all are apostles, prophets, or healers. As there is no corresponding question for administration, Beyer surmises that “any member of the congregation may step in to serve as deacon or ruler. Hence these offices, as distinct from those mentioned in v. 29, may be elective. But this does not alter the fact that for their proper discharge the *charisma* of God is indispensable.” (Ibid.)

of the church. Similarly, the Holy Spirit through Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders in every town (Titus 1:5). This practice is also noted in the early missionary journeys recorded in Acts 14:23 as Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each church. This intentional act provides stable leadership to organize and equip the churches. As to the qualifications of elders, there is an expectation of being able to manage their household well (see 1 Timothy 3:4-5) with the implication being that if one cannot manage their household well, they are not fit to manage God's household.

This understanding of "management" flows into the third area of focus: administration as stewardship. As mentioned in connection with Creation, the concept of stewardship has its foundation in God's mandates to humanity. The understanding of stewardship runs throughout Scripture. In connection to the church, the terminology is enlightening. In addition to *kubernesis*, the term for the steward of a house, *oikonomos*, is applied to a different type of administrative function within the church. In 1 Corinthians 4:1f, Paul uses the term to describe the role of apostles as stewards of the mysteries of God. "The steward is entrusted with the treasures of the Gospel; he has knowledge of God's plan of salvation."<sup>12</sup> The task of stewarding the household of God is closely connected to the expectation of declaring the Gospel with clarity in the manner of one's service. The next verse (4:2) declares that the "chief thing required in a steward is faithfulness."<sup>13</sup> Administrators are accountable to God. Their role is not to exalt themselves, but to conduct themselves in faithful service to God. They serve as faithful stewards in obedience to God. The New Testament church, like ancient Israel, requires structure. Administration in the church is not just about organizing logistics, but about spiritual discipline, character, accountability, and stewardship.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the ultimate act of rescue, not only for individuals but for the entire created order, including the practice of administration. Christ's life, death, and resurrection initiate a

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<sup>12</sup> Otto Michel, "oikonomos," in in *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume V*, G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, eds. G. Bromley, trans. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967), p. 150.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

restoration of what was lost in the Fall and provide a new model and power for leadership and service. Two aspects should receive special focus. First, the Jesus restores relationships. Through Christ, the primary, broken relationship between humanity and God is restored. Believers are reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:18-20), enabling them once again to access divine wisdom and guidance for their lives and their leadership. This vertical reconciliation is the basis for horizontal reconciliation. In Christ, the dividing walls of hostility are broken down (Eph. 2:14), making true community and collaborative service possible within the church. Second, stewardship is redeemed as a model of service. Jesus perfectly modeled and redefined stewardship. He, the ultimate King, came “not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). This reorients administration from the pursuit of power to an act of service.<sup>14</sup> The redeemed leader is a steward who serves the Master by serving His people. The goal is not self-exaltation but the building up of the body of Christ.

One finds several striking examples of this rescued understanding of administrative leadership in the New Testament. Jesus is the definitive model<sup>15</sup> for the Christian. Jesus, while primarily a teacher and savior, was also an organizer. He chose the twelve apostles, forming a core leadership team, and sent out the seventy-two in an organized mission (Luke 10:1), demonstrating the necessity of structure for the advancement of the gospel. Within the setting of the church, one should take particular interest in the establishment of deacons. The early church provides a clear example of administrative problem-solving in Acts 6. When a dispute arose over the daily distribution to widows, the apostles did not dismiss the complaint. Instead, they guided the church to select seven men “of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom” to administer this service. This act created the office of deacon, a structural solution that preserved unity, met a practical need, and freed the apostles to focus on their primary calling of prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:1-7). The Holy Spirit’s emphasis on the qualifications for church leaders (elders and deacons) in passages

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<sup>14</sup> See the discussion of the Greek term “*diakonia*” in the introductory chapter.

<sup>15</sup> The understanding of Jesus’ model of Servant Leadership will be explored in a later chapter.

like 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 is profoundly significant. Most of these qualifications are not about skill, charisma, or business acumen, but about character. A leader must be “above reproach,” “sober-minded,” “self-controlled,” “respectable,” “hospitable,” and “able to teach.” This priority demonstrates that in God’s economy, redeemed character is the non-negotiable prerequisite for sound administration. A leader’s personal godliness is the foundation for their public service.

### **The Consummation as the Final Picture of Administrative Declarations of God**

The biblical narrative concludes with the promise of a final consummation—a new heaven and a new earth where God’s redemptive plan is brought to its perfect completion. This eschatological hope informs the church’s present administrative task. In the new creation, the effects of the Fall are completely eradicated. The description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22 is one of perfect order, beauty, and fruitfulness, where God dwells with His people. The final chapters of the New Testament reflect the opening chapters of the Old Testament—the ultimate fulfillment of the administrative order first seen in the Garden of Eden. God’s orderliness is once again understood not only in the creation of the new heavens and new earth but also in the detailed creation of the holy city, new Jerusalem. In the vision, the city is measured revealing a precision in the equal distances of its height, length, and width—a perfect cube (see Revelation 21:15-17). One might recall that in the whole of Scripture there is only one other measured cube-shaped structure commanded by God: the Holy of Holies in the Temple (1 Kings 6:20). The entirety of new Jerusalem is equated to the Holy place of the Temple because God dwells with His people in the city—the presence of God fills it completely! God is meticulous in detail and order as He creates anew. As with the opening chapters of Genesis, there is also mandate for humanity. In the new Jerusalem, the people of God are seen as the servants of God who serve Him faithfully (Revelation 22:3); thus, in the consummation of faith, one finds work is ordained in the service of God. This service will be unhindered by sin, frustration, or relational conflict. The toil of work will be gone, replaced by joyful, fulfilling, and perfectly effective service to the King. This future hope motivates the church’s often difficult administrative work in the present. Such a man-

date reveals again that ultimately all work by the Christian is for the glory of God. Further, in the end, all administration will be directly under God's authority. "The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it" (Rev. 22:3), signifying a complete and undisputed reign. The church's current administrative structures are a temporary and imperfect anticipation of this perfect, God-directed order.

## **THE CHURCH AS AN ORGANIZED ORGANISM**

The preceding biblical-theological survey leads to a central paradox: the church is simultaneously a living, spiritual organism and a structured, earthly organization. These two realities are not contradictory but complementary. The "organism" speaks to its divine life and source, while the "organization" speaks to the divinely ordained structure through which that life is expressed and nurtured. Effective church administration, therefore, is grounded in the nature of the church itself—created by God as a spiritual organism and structured by God as an ordered organization—holding these two truths in creative tension. Neglecting either aspect is to create an unhealthy ecclesiology. A church that is all "organism" with no "organization" risks descending into the chaos of subjectivity and disorder, where "everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Conversely, a church that is all "organization" with no "organism" becomes a lifeless, bureaucratic institution, devoid of the Spirit's power and presence.

### **The Church is a Living Organism**

The New Testament is replete with organic metaphors for the church. It is a spiritual house built of living stones (1 Pet. 2:5), a body with Christ as the head (Eph. 1:22-23), and a bride being prepared for her husband (Eph. 5:25-27). Crucially, the church is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Paul asks, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 3:16). This indwelling Spirit is the lifeblood of the organism, the source of its vitality, growth, and power.

#### *The Temple of the Holy Spirit*

The reason for the "organic" nature of the church is the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is God who brings life to this organism. This truth is

foundational. Two aspects of this reality are highlighted in the New Testament. First, the believers are the temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells: “Don’t you know that you are God’s sanctuary and that the Spirit of God lives in you?” (1 Cor. 3:16); “...For we are the sanctuary of the living God...” (2 Cor. 6:16). Second, the Holy Spirit through Peter informs believers that they “...as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house...” (1 Peter 2:5). The church is not merely a building or a social club; it is the sacred space where the living God makes His dwelling on earth through His Spirit. This reality imbues every aspect of the church's life, including its administration, with profound spiritual significance. Unlike the Old Testament temple, which was a physical structure, the New Testament temple is organic and dynamic, composed of redeemed people indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The church therefore lives, grows, and functions by divine life rather than human effort alone.

#### *The Believer is the Priest of that Temple*

The Holy Spirit explains the purpose of being built together as a spiritual house for the believers are a “holy priesthood” commanded “...to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 2:5). Every member, then, has a priestly role to play, a ministry to perform within the life of the body as every Christian has direct access to God and a role in His service. This priestly identity reinforces the organic nature of the church. Ministry is not confined to clergy or offices alone but is shared across the body. The administration of the church, therefore, must aim to facilitate and coordinate the priestly service of all believers rather than hinder it.

#### *The Cornerstone of the Church is Jesus Christ*

Although the church is a living organism composed of many believers, it is neither autonomous nor self-generated! The Holy Spirit through Paul reminds the believer that entire structure is “... built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus Himself as the chief cornerstone.” (Eph. 2:20). Christ is both the source of the very life for this organism as well as the one who provides direction and purpose. The cornerstone determines alignment, stability, and coherence. Any form of church administration, therefore, that is not

grounded in the lordship of Christ risks distorting the church's identity and mission. All administrative plans, programs, and policies must be aligned with and tested against the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the ultimate reference point for the church's identity and mission.

## **The Church is an Organized Organism**

This living organism is not an amorphous blob; it has a God-given structure. The Spirit who gives life also gives gifts and order to the body for its health and effective function in the world. The Holy Spirit through Scripture reveals that the church is intentionally organized by God for God's purposes and glory. One of the most insightful comparisons used by the Holy Spirit is the image of the church as the body of Christ (Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-11).

### *A Diversity of Gifts within One Body.*

All individual believers who make up the body of Christ have spiritual gifts. The Holy Spirit sovereignly distributes a variety of spiritual gifts (e.g., prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership) to every member of the body. These gifts are not random; they are sovereignly distributed and purposefully integrated. The Holy Spirit reminds us that different gifts are distributed "according to the grace given us..." (Rom. 12:6). This diversity is not for personal status but for the "common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). As the health of the whole depends on the faithful operation of each part, a key task of church administration is to help believers discover, develop, and deploy their gifts in ministry.

### *Interdependent with Different Functions*

In 1 Corinthians 12:12–26, the Holy Spirit stresses that the various parts of the body are interdependent with no member being self-sufficient, and no function being expendable. Romans 12:4 similarly affirms that while the body has many parts, "...all the parts do not all have the same function." Furthermore, this interdependence is highlighted, the Holy Spirit continues, "...we who are many are one body in Christ and individually *members of one another*." (Rom. 12:5, emphasis added). The Holy Spirit's analogy of the body emphasizes both diversity and unity. Each part is different, yet each is essential. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I

have no need of you.” This interdependence requires coordination, communication, and leadership—the very essence of administration.

### *Gifted Leadership*

While all members are gifted, God specifically gives certain gifted individuals to the church as leaders (e.g., apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers). Their purpose is “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). Furthermore, as mentioned above<sup>16</sup> specific gifts of leadership and administration are explicitly mentioned (Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28). Similarly, as noted above, the appointment of leaders in Acts 6 demonstrates the practical necessity of administrative oversight. The apostles recognized that without structured leadership, ministry effectiveness and unity would suffer. Church leadership, therefore, is not simply an attempt to be practical, but an expression of God’s design. God Himself through the gifting of the Holy Spirit provides the organizational leadership required for the body to function properly.

## **CONCLUSION: UNDERSTANDING THE LEADER’S CALL TO ADMINISTRATION**

The leader, therefore, is called to administrate the affairs of this organized organism so that there will be peace, harmonized relationships, a sense of rest and contentment within the body of Christ in mobility towards the fulfillment of the mission of God. The purpose of church administration is not bureaucratic control but the cultivation of a healthy environment where the church can thrive and accomplish the mission of God in its context. Administration does not hinder the spiritual life of the church; rather, it serves it. Good administration creates clarity, fosters trust, resolves conflict, and mobilizes resources, thereby promoting peace and harmony. Biblical administration seeks to align people, resources, and structures with God’s purposes. This well-ordered internal life allows the church to move forward effectively in its external mission to the world.

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<sup>16</sup> See the discussion of “Administration and Leadership Restored by God” in the biblical theological survey above.

## Why Church Administration?

The necessity for this organization is rooted in the very character of God and His revealed will for His people. In the context of correcting chaotic worship practices in Corinth, the Holy Spirit directs Paul to ground his instruction in theology proper: the nature of God Himself is orderly. Plainly stated, "...God is not a God of disorder but of peace." (1 Cor. 14:33). Peace, *eirene*, in this context does not simply refer to the absence of conflict but to the expectation of harmony and order. Therefore, His church, which is to reflect His character, should also be marked by order and peace, not confusion.

Administration becomes the normal expression of one's theology because it reflects God's orderly nature. Disorder within the church contradicts the character of the God whom the church represents. The Holy Spirit continues the admonitions to the Corinthian church with the declaration that "everything must be done decently and in order." (1 Cor. 14:40). This command by the Holy Spirit concludes the instructions on worship and spiritual gifts thus connecting structure and order to the unhindered expression of faithful worship and ministry in the Corinthian church. It serves as a universal maxim for the entire life of the church. "Decently" implies what is fitting and appropriate for the people of God; "in order" points to a planned, structured, and non-chaotic approach. This command is the biblical mandate for administration so that church can fulfill the mission of God by ensuring that all things are done decently, in order, and ultimately, for the glory of God.

As demonstrated in the survey of organizational leadership within the biblical narrative earlier in the chapter, one can recognize that God worked through communities led by appointed leaders in both Israel and the church. God did not leave Israel or the church to figure things out on their own but provided leadership structures to guide them. The leadership of such persons as Moses or Paul demonstrate clearly that administration is integral to God's mission, not incidental to it. Both were appointed by God to carry out His mission. Both were ordained of God to record God's instruction in written form with offices within each organization. The parallel is clear. Just as Moses received the Law at Sinai, the church leader receives instruction from God through Scripture and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. The church adminis-

trator, particularly the pastor-elder, is like the helmsman of a ship.<sup>17</sup> He does not own the vessel, determine the destination, or provide the power; the owner is God, the destination is the fulfillment of the Great Commission and the glory of God, and the power is the Holy Spirit. One is reminded that before giving the commission of his disciples, Jesus first states that “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth... therefore...” (Mt. 28:18-19). In considering these words by Jesus, Gaddy offered four important declarations:<sup>18</sup>

- Authority of Jesus Establishes the Priority of the Church/Disciple
- Authority of Jesus Provides the Ability of the Church/Disciple
- Authority of Jesus Shapes the Identity of the Church/Disciple
- Authority of Jesus Demands Activity by the Church/Disciple

Such declarations raise questions for the church: How is ministry in the church revealing a fidelity to Jesus’ authority? How is the church declaring its identity as the people of God in obedience to the purposes of God in carrying out the Great Commission? Is the church truly following **THE** leader, Jesus Christ? The helmsman's job is to steer the ship skillfully according to the owner's charts (Scripture) to bring it safely to its intended harbor. This task is the high and holy calling of administration in the organized organism known as the church.

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<sup>17</sup> See again, the discussion on the word “administrator” (*kubernesis*) and its imagery as a helmsman (note 10 above).

<sup>18</sup> C. Welton Gaddy, “Why the Great Commission” in *The Ministers Manual*, 1994 Edition, James Cox, Ed. (Canada: HarperCollins Publisher, 1993).



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## CHAPTER 3

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### **A PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY ADMINISTRATION**

In the broad landscape of organizational theory, Christian ministry administration occupies a unique and sacred space. While it may borrow tools and techniques from secular management, its core philosophy, motivations, and ultimate measures of success are radically different.<sup>1</sup> Secular administration often prioritizes profit, market share, and efficiency as its definitive ends. In stark contrast, Christian administration is fundamentally a theological endeavor—a form of worship and stewardship where spiritual outcomes and relational integrity are paramount in fulfilling the mission of God. This chapter explores the foundational principles that define a distinctly Christian approach to leading and managing a ministry. It argues that this approach transforms administration from a mere set of tasks into a dynamic expression of faith aimed at developing Christlike followers on mission with Christ. This paradigm necessitates a critical re-evaluation of conventional administrative models, demanding the deep integration of theological principles and spiritual discernment into all operational aspects of ministry.

### **THE DISTINCTIVE NATURE OF CHRISTIAN MINISTRY ADMINISTRATION**

The primary distinction of Christian administration lies in its theological grounding, which reorients its purpose, practices, and principles

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<sup>1</sup> See J.D. Berkley, ed., *Leadership Handbook of Management and Administration* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007) for a comprehensive understanding of Personal and Church Administration.

away from secular norms. This foundation involves more than simply applying a veneer of Christian values to existing business models; it requires a fundamental reimagining of organizational life through a biblical worldview.

### **Beyond Secular Models: The Stewardship Paradigm**

As noted in the previous chapter, the dominant paradigm in Christian administration is stewardship, which stands in direct opposition to the agency theory prevalent in secular management. Agency theory focuses on aligning the interests of agents (managers) with those of principals (owners), often through financial incentives and control mechanisms. The stewardship model, however, moves beyond an agency perspective by emphasizing the long-term well-being of the collective over individual self-interest, thereby influencing decisions within both market and community logics. Christian leaders are viewed not as owners but as stewards managing God's affairs, accountable first and foremost to Him for their actions. This theological understanding posits that human ownership is temporary, a “right to use” granted by God, which entails a profound responsibility to manage communal resources for collective social interests.

This stewardship perspective redefines success beyond quantitative achievements, prompting inquiry into the qualitative impacts and ethical implications of administrative practices. It challenges Christian administrators to consciously embed their faith into their professional practices, moving beyond mere faith integration to a more profound “Kingdom Integration.” This approach fundamentally reimagines organizational structures and management processes through a theological lens, envisioning a reality shaped by personal, relational, communal, and redemptive principles. It is a holistic endeavor where spiritual growth and communal well-being are inextricably linked to operational effectiveness and strategic planning of the ministry.

### **The Divine Mandate: Leadership as Stewardship and Partnership**

The starting point for any philosophy of Christian administration is its ultimate purpose. Unlike a business created to generate shareholder value, a Christian organization exists to serve God's purposes. This reality reorients the entire understanding of leadership and management.

### *Leadership's Purpose: Cultivating a Fertile Climate*

The primary role of leadership in Christian organizations is not to command and control, but **to create a fertile climate for spiritual service**. A leader acts as a gardener, not a mechanic. A mechanic can force parts together to build a machine, but a gardener understands that growth cannot be forced; it can only be nurtured. This “fertile climate” is characterized by three key elements:

- **A Sense of Shared Mission:** The leader constantly clarifies and communicates the "why" behind the ministry's work, connecting every task, no matter how mundane, to the grander narrative of God's redemptive plan.
- **Wise Stewardship of Resources:** This extends beyond financial prudence to include the careful and prayerful management of people's time, gifts, and energy. Resources are seen as God's provision, to be used for His glory.
- **Mutual Supportiveness:** The leader fosters an environment where encouragement, grace, and forgiveness are the norm, allowing individuals to serve without fear of failure, knowing they are supported by the community.

### *Management as a Means, Not an End*

The purpose of a Christian ministry is not excellent management per se. Management is merely a means to the end of serving God. This principle provides a crucial check against the temptation to idolize efficiency. While excellence, organization, and strategic planning are valuable, they are tools in the service of a higher calling. A ministry can have flawless accounting, perfectly executed programs, and a pristine facility, yet fail in its core purpose if it lacks spiritual vitality, love, and a genuine connection to God. Success is measured not by the smoothness of the operation, but by the fruit of the Spirit, the transformation of lives, and faithfulness to the Gospel. Therefore, a leader must always ask: “Is our management structure serving our mission, or has our mission become subservient to our structure?”

### *The Ultimate Partnership with God*

Christian leadership is, at its core, **a partnership with God, built on prayer, faith, and obedience.** The leader is not the ultimate authority or the sole strategist. They are a co-laborer with Christ, who is the true head of the Church. This understanding infuses administration with profound humility and dependence. Strategic plans are drafted in pencil, held before God in prayer. Decisions are made not just on data and analysis, but through seeking spiritual discernment. The leader's authority is derived not from their position, but from their submission to God's authority. This divine partnership is the anchor that keeps the ministry from drifting into secularism or self-reliance.

### **The Ministry as Family: A People-Centered and Participative Model**

If the “why” of Christian administration is partnership with God, the “who” is the people of God. A biblical philosophy of administration places an extraordinary value on the individuals who make up the ministry team, viewing them not as human resources but as a spiritual family.

### *Valuing People Beyond Performance*

In a corporate setting, an employee's value is often directly tied to their performance contributions. Christian ministry has a fundamentally different perspective. **Team members are valued not only for their performance but also because they are members of God's family.** Their inherent worth is established by their identity in Christ, not by their efficiency or output. This understanding means that a team member who is struggling personally, making mistakes, or going through a season of low productivity is not seen as a liability to be managed, but as a brother or sister to be supported, restored, and cared for. This perspective shapes everything from performance reviews to conflict resolution, infusing these processes with grace and a redemptive focus.

### *The Team as a Caring Community*

The ministry team is to be a “family” of people who care about and for one another. This concept moves the team dynamic beyond mere professionalism into the realm of authentic community. It implies a

commitment to bearing one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), celebrating successes together, and offering practical, emotional, and spiritual support. In a "family" model, team meetings might include time for personal sharing and prayer alongside agenda items. Success is a collective achievement, and failure is a collective opportunity for learning and grace. This deep level of care creates a resilient, loyal, and deeply committed team that can weather the inevitable storms of ministry.

#### *People-Centered and Participative Leadership*

Because people are valued as family, the leadership style must be **people-centered and participative**. An autocratic, top-down approach is antithetical to this philosophy. A people-centered leader prioritizes the well-being and growth of their team. A participative leader understands that God has distributed gifts and wisdom throughout the body, not just at the top of the organizational chart. They actively solicit input, empower team members to take ownership of their areas of ministry, and foster a culture where every voice is heard and respected. This approach doesn't mean leadership by committee or the abdication of responsibility; the leader still makes final decisions. Those decisions, however, are made after having prayerfully and respectfully engaged with the wisdom of the team.

### **Theological Foundations as an Ethical Framework**

The theological grounding of Christian administration provides a robust ethical framework that guides decision-making in all facets of ministry operations. This framework is built upon virtues such as honesty, integrity, stewardship, love, and justice. These virtues, particularly trust and trustworthiness, can mitigate the need for the extensive control mechanisms common in secular organizations, which are often predicated on assumptions of human opportunism. This perspective requires leaders to embody personal integrity and to foster ethical organizations, echoing foundational principles of authority, responsibility, and accountability long espoused within Christian thought. This deeply embedded spiritual dimension transforms typical organizational structures into vehicles for divine service, where governance is understood as a sacred responsibility.

## CORE PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLES

The theological foundations of Christian administration manifest in several core principles that shape the daily life and operations of a ministry. These principles transform administrative functions from secular necessities into spiritual disciplines.

### **Administration as an Act of Worship**

A transformative perspective within Christian administration is the view of administrative work as an act of worship. This revelation re-frames mundane tasks—such as budgeting, scheduling, and personnel management—into sacred duties, reflecting a consecrated offering of time, talent, and resources to God. This approach elevates administrative functions to the level of spiritual disciplines, underscoring their inherent value in advancing divine purposes. It encourages Christian leaders to perform their duties with diligence, excellence, and a prayerful attitude, recognizing that their efforts contribute directly to the spiritual flourishing of the community and the advancement of God's kingdom. This perspective inherently links effective administration with spiritual commitment, thereby transforming the very nature of organizational governance within the ministry.

### **Leadership as Relational Theology**

Christian administration underscores the critical importance of fostering healthy, God-honoring relationships within the ministry. Effective leadership is understood as being fundamentally about serving others and building community. This theological lens redefines governance from a purely contractual framework to one emphasizing covenantal relationships, which foster mutual accountability and a shared purpose among all participants. This relational theology extends to valuing individuals, creating an environment where ethical considerations like fairness, integrity, and the dignity of each person are paramount in all administrative decisions.<sup>2</sup> Justice becomes a cornerstone of ethical leadership, ensuring that all individuals receive equitable opportunities and

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<sup>2</sup> See C.W. Walter, *Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Influence and Service* (Illinois: IVP, 2009), pp. 170-175.

are treated impartially, thereby reducing internal conflicts and fostering organizational trust.<sup>3</sup> Thus, ministry leaders are called to prioritize moral principles and values, emphasizing honesty and transparency to promote trustworthiness and accountability.

## **REDEFINING SUCCESS: SPIRITUAL OUTCOMES AND KINGDOM IMPACT**

Perhaps the most radical departure from secular models is how Christian ministry administration defines and measures success. The focus shifts from purely quantitative and financial metrics to qualitative, spiritual, and missional outcomes.

### **Disciple-Making as a Primary Metric**

In Christian ministry, success is not merely organizational growth or financial stability but the qualitative transformation of individuals and communities. This success is evidenced by spiritual maturity, service, and adherence to biblical teachings. Consequently, disciple-making becomes a fundamental metric that reorients the conventional understanding of success by focusing on the spiritual maturation and mission engagement of individuals. Administrative structures and processes are evaluated based on their direct contribution to fostering spiritual growth, cultivating Christ-like character, and equipping members for active participation in the Great Commission. This approach requires a multifaceted assessment, incorporating both quantitative data on participation and qualitative insights into the spiritual development and missional impact of congregants.<sup>4</sup> While spiritual transformation is the ultimate goal, effective administration can also manifest in quantifiable ways, such as membership growth, which may correlate with perceived leadership effectiveness; however, unlike secular models where profit maximization is the primary objective, Christian administration integrates multiple bottom lines, measuring spiritual and social impact alongside financial viability.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 175.

<sup>4</sup> See J. Wiest, *Banding Together: A Practical Guide for Disciple Makers* (Indiana: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2018).

## **Kingdom Impact as the Ultimate Goal**

The ultimate measure of success for Christian ministry administration lies in its contribution to the holistic advancement of God's Kingdom. This understanding encompasses societal transformation, evangelistic outreach, and ethical influence that extends beyond the immediate congregational boundaries. Success is evaluated by the extent to which the ministry's activities foster justice, peace, and spiritual flourishing in the broader community, reflecting a comprehensive engagement with God's redemptive purposes. This expanded view integrates the spiritual nourishment of the congregation with a tangible impact on societal well-being, moving beyond mere internal which aligns with the theological understanding of the church as an active agent in "managing the household of God" within society offering a redemptive culture that shapes society through the mission of God rather than merely confronting it.

## **PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR MINISTRY LEADERSHIP**

The principles of Christian administration have profound implications for the practice of leadership within the church and other faith-based organizations. They call for a specific type of leader and a distinct organizational culture.

### **Developing Christlike Servant Leaders**

Central to Christian ministry administration is the imperative to cultivate leaders who embody the virtues and character of Christ. This ensures that administrative actions are consistently aligned with biblical principles and exhibit servant leadership.<sup>5</sup> This approach, which emphasizes humility, empowerment, and a focus on the growth of others, contrasts sharply with secular models that often prioritize hierarchical authority and self-interest.<sup>6</sup> Developing such leaders involves intentional discipleship, men-

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<sup>5</sup> See L.O. Richards and C. Hoeldtke, *A Theology of Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> See D.J. Ireland, *Stewardship and the Kingdom of God: An Historical, Exegetical and Contextual Study of the Parable of the Unjust Steward in Luke 16:1-13* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1992) for an interesting perspective on the Unjust Steward in Luke 16:1-13.

torship, and theological education to foster a spiritual depth that transcends mere managerial competence. These leaders are called to be anticipatory and discerning, aligning people and systems with God's preferred future and fostering communal sense-making within their congregations. This Christ-centered approach fosters an environment where stakeholders are treated with respect, minimizing unethical behavior and enhancing the organization's reputation for integrity.

### **The Journey and the Destination: Christlike Character and Conduct**

In Christian ministry, the process is as important as the product. The way a team works together is a direct reflection of its witness to the world. The goal is not just to accomplish tasks, but to become more like the one they serve.

#### *How We Work Matters as Much as What We Do*

This understanding is a radical departure from the “ends justify the means” mentality that can creep into any organization. The principle that **how Christians work with one another is just as important as what they are striving to accomplish** means that integrity, kindness, patience, and humility are non-negotiable. A ministry cannot claim to be about God's love while tolerating a culture of gossip, backbiting, or unresolved conflict. The internal culture of the organization is part of its public testimony. Therefore, leaders must model and demand a process that reflects the character of Christ. Conflict resolution, decision-making, and daily interactions must all be conducted in a way that honors God and builds up the body.

#### *Leadership as Discipleship*

A key aim of ministry leadership is to help team members become more Christlike. This principle elevates administration to the level of discipleship. The leader is not just a manager of tasks but a mentor of souls. The workplace becomes a workshop for spiritual formation. A leader is concerned with a team member's character development, spiritual disciplines, and personal walk with God. They create opportunities for growth, provide gentle correction, model a life of faith, and intentionally invest in the spiritual well-being of their team. The great-

est success of a Christian leader is not a balanced budget or a growing attendance, but a team of people who, through their service together, have grown deeper in their love for God and more conformed to the image of His Son.

### **Unity in Mission: The Power of Cooperation and Shared Vision**

A ministry team united by a transcendent purpose operates on a different motivational plane than a typical workforce. The internal dynamics are shaped by a shared spiritual calling rather than by individual ambition.

#### *The High Value of Cooperation and Teamwork*

In a family, cooperation is essential for the health of the household. Similarly, **leadership within ministry places a high value on cooperation and teamwork.** Silos and internal competition are toxic to a ministry's spiritual health. The leader's job is to break down departmental walls and foster a "one-team" mentality. This task is achieved by constantly reinforcing the shared mission and showing how each person's role contributes to the whole. Success is defined not by the achievements of one department, but by the overall progress of the ministry in fulfilling its God-given vision. Teamwork is not just a strategy for efficiency; it is a practical expression of the biblical call to unity within the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:3).

#### *Motivation Beyond Personal Gain*

Team members are motivated by a shared sense of vision and mission, which is more important to them than personal gain. Goals are pursued selflessly and sacrificially. While fair compensation is a matter of justice, the primary driver for a ministry team member is not the paycheck. It is the profound satisfaction of being part of something eternal. A compelling, God-honoring vision ignites passion and inspires sacrifice. When people believe that they are contributing to changing lives for eternity, they are willing to go above and beyond what a job description requires. They pursue goals selflessly because the mission's success is their reward. The leader's role is to be the chief visionary, consistently painting a picture of the preferred future and reminding the team of the impact of their collective efforts.

## CONCLUSION

The administration of Christian ministry transcends conventional secular management by grounding its practices in theological principles, spiritual formation, and a commitment to the holistic advancement of God's Kingdom. This distinct philosophy redefines the purpose of administration, transforming it from a set of managerial tasks into a vital expression of worship and stewardship. It prioritizes relational integrity, spiritual outcomes, and communal well-being over secular metrics of success like market share or profit. By reorienting ministry goals toward mission, disciple-making and Kingdom impact, Christian administration offers a compelling alternative to worldly models of leadership and organization. It demonstrates that even the most practical aspects of ministry, such as taking care of the finances of the church, can become a praxis of salvation, contributing to the fulfillment of the mission of God through the church. Ultimately, a biblically grounded administrative philosophy is not merely an operational necessity but a theological imperative, essential for the church to fulfill faithfully its divine mandate in the world.



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## CHAPTER 4

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# JESUS AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The phrase “servant leadership” is used a lot in modern management circles, but its actual meaning can sometimes get lost in the corporate jargon. To truly grasp its power, we need to separate its secular version—most famously championed by R.K. Greenleaf<sup>1</sup>—from its deep theological roots found in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Understanding both models, and the key differences between them, is essential to seeing why a biblically informed approach to leadership is so uniquely transformative.

### THE BIBLICAL MODEL: THE SERVANT LEADERSHIP OF JESUS CHRIST

Long before “servant leadership” became a trendy topic in business schools, it was a radical, counter-cultural way of life modeled by Jesus Christ. His approach completely challenges and changes the traditional power pyramid upside down. Instead of sitting at the top demanding to be served, the leader stands at the bottom, serving the needs of everyone else. When we look closely at the biblical texts, we find a complete blueprint for this kind of leadership, which boils down to three connected parts: the motivation, the attitude, and the action.

#### The Motivation: “Agape” Love

What drove Christ to lead the way He did? It wasn't ambition, a craving for status, or a desire to boss people around. It was a deep, selfless love.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1970).

We see this clearly in two key passages. First, when explaining His life's mission, Jesus said, "...the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28, NIV). This motivation completely shatters normal ideas about leadership. The goal isn't to take, but to give—and the ultimate form of giving is sacrificing one's own life. This action goes way beyond simple kindness; it is a redemptive act fueled by a very specific type of love.

The Gospel of John gives us a closer look at this love during Jesus's final hours with His friends: "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1, NIV). The word used for love here is the Greek term *agape*. It means a selfless, unconditional, sacrificial love that wants the absolute best for someone else, without expecting anything in return.<sup>2</sup> When a leader is motivated by *agape*, their whole worldview shifts. The people they lead are no longer viewed as mere tools to hit a target or boost the bottom line. Instead, the growth, well-being, and ultimate success of the community become the leader's main goal.<sup>3</sup> In this model, power isn't a weapon used *over* people; it is a tool used *for, through, and by* the people.

## **The Attitude: Radical Humility**

If *agape* love is the engine of Christian servant leadership, humility is the steering wheel.<sup>4</sup> It is this inner mindset of humility that makes outward acts of service possible. The most vivid example of this happened in the Upper Room, where Jesus took on a chore that was usually forced upon the lowest-ranking slaves in a household:

*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so, he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began*

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<sup>2</sup> S. P. Peekunnel and V.S. Thiagarajan, "Understanding Agape Leadership: A Scoping Review," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 105(1) (2024).

<sup>3</sup> A.K. Schnackenberg, E.C. Tomlinson, & L.R. James, L. R. "Agape leadership: A review and future directions," *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 25(4) (2018) pp. 411-426.

<sup>4</sup> K.O. Gangel, *Building Leaders for Church Education*. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), p. 73.

*to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John 13:3-5, NIV)*

The setup in verse 3 is incredibly important. Jesus didn't wash their feet because He forgot who He was or because He suffered from low self-esteem. It was the exact opposite. He served them from a place of absolute security and ultimate authority: "knowing that the Father had put all things under his power." This reality highlights the beautiful paradox of true, godly humility. Humility isn't thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less. It is a deliberate choice to set aside your status and privileges for the sake of others, precisely because you are completely secure in who you are.<sup>5</sup>

While secular leaders often use their power to build walls and enforce a hierarchy, Jesus tore those walls down. His supreme authority was the exact reason He felt free to kneel and wash the dirty feet of His followers. By grabbing that towel, Jesus flipped every social and religious rule about honor and status on its head.<sup>6</sup> He proved that real leadership is about humility, not self-promotion. Humility isn't a weakness; it is a profound strength guided by divine authority—what we might call "controlled power." A genuine servant leader, like a good Pastor, knows how to take the influence they have and use it entirely for the benefit of the people they serve.

### **The Action: Demonstrative Service**

A leadership philosophy might sound wonderful on paper, but it is useless until it is put into action. Jesus didn't just talk about serving; He demonstrated it. In the Gospel of Matthew, He gives a direct order: "whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave" (Matthew 20:26-27, NIV). But it is the foot-washing scene in John 13 that brings this command to life. Look at the action words used: "got up," "took off," "wrapped," "poured," "began to wash." These are deliberate, physical steps; thus, revealing what leading by example looks like.

Jesus didn't sit at the head of the table and give a PowerPoint presentation on the theory of service. He interrupted dinner, took off His nice

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<sup>5</sup> W. Lyons, "Servant Leadership and Agape Love: A Review and Synthesis," *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 25(2) (2004), pp. 118-134.

<sup>6</sup> R.J. Starratt, *Drama of Leadership* (London: The Falmer Press, 1993), p. 7.

clothes, and picked up the tools of a servant—a towel and a basin. His actions backed up His words and left a permanent mark on His disciples (so much so that Peter initially tried to stop Him in John 13:8). The brilliance of this model is how it shatters expectations. It proves that in God's kingdom, greatness isn't about how many people serve you; it's about how actively you serve others, even in the most unglamorous ways. For Jesus, leadership wasn't a fancy title; it was an action to be performed.

## **THE SECULAR MODEL: ROBERT K. GREENLEAF'S SERVANT-LEADER**

When people talk about servant leadership in the business world today, they are usually referring to the ideas of Robert K. Greenleaf, a former executive at AT&T. In his groundbreaking 1970 essay, “The Servant as Leader,” Greenleaf introduced a leadership philosophy that has since reshaped countless companies.<sup>7</sup> While his ideas use similar words to the biblical model, they come from a very different place and aim for a different finish line.

### **Origins and Core Tenets**

Greenleaf didn't get his inspiration from the Bible. Instead, he was inspired by a fictional book by Hermann Hesse called *Journey to the East*. In the story, a group of men are on a spiritual quest, accompanied by a servant named Leo. Leo does all their menial chores, but he also keeps their spirits high with his singing and positive attitude. When Leo suddenly disappears, the group falls apart and abandons the journey. Years later, the narrator discovers a shocking truth: Leo, the man they treated as a lowly servant, was the head of the entire Order that sponsored the journey. He was their great and noble leader all along. This story sparked Greenleaf's big idea: “The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead.”<sup>8</sup>

This “servant-first” mindset is the key. It separates the servant-leader from the “leader-first” person, who is usually chasing power or money.

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<sup>7</sup> G. SanFacon and L. C. Spears, *Servant-Leadership Essay Series Essay 13- Holistic Servant Leadership* (Illinois: The Spears Center for Servant-Leadership, 2008), p 1.

<sup>8</sup> Greenleaf, p. 27.

For Greenleaf, the main drive is a natural, built-in desire to help others. Becoming a leader is just a secondary step—a way to serve people on a larger scale. Greenleaf believed the ultimate test of this kind of leadership is how it affects the followers: “Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?”<sup>9</sup> This test is all about human development and social justice, creating a highly ethical, human-centered way to lead.

## The Ten Characteristics

Building on Greenleaf’s original ideas, Spears broke down his writings into ten practical traits of a servant-leader which provide a clear picture of how this form of leadership looks in everyday life:<sup>10</sup>

- **Listening:** Truly hearing what others are saying.
- **Empathy:** Trying to understand and share the feelings of others.
- **Healing:** Helping to make people (and oneself) whole.
- **Awareness:** Being observant, especially regarding self-awareness.
- **Persuasion:** Convincing people to get on board, rather than using authority to force them.
- **Conceptualization:** Thinking big and dreaming beyond the daily grind.
- **Foresight:** Anticipating the likely outcomes of a situation.
- **Stewardship:** Managing the organization for the greater good of society.
- **Commitment to the growth of people:** Valuing people for who they are, not just what they produce.
- **Building community:** Creating a strong sense of togetherness within the organization.

These traits describe a leader who cares deeply about relationships, ethics, and creating a healthy environment where people feel empowered.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> L.C. Spears, “Character and servant leadership: Ten Characteristics of Effective, Caring Leaders,” *Journal of Virtues & Leadership*, 1(1) (2010), pp. 25-30.

## A CRITICAL DISTINCTION: BIBLICAL VS GREENLEAF'S SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Greenleaf's model is fantastic and a huge step up from bossy, autocratic leadership. One must recognize, however, that it is not the same as the biblical model. The two frameworks are fundamentally different in where they come from, what drives them, and what they are trying to achieve.<sup>11</sup>

First, they get their authority from different places. For Greenleaf, wanting to serve is a "natural feeling," and choosing to lead is a personal decision. The authority comes from within the person. In the biblical model, leadership is a calling from God. The leader is a steward appointed by God and answers directly to Him. Jesus's authority came from the Father (John 13:3). A Christian leader's authority is handed down by Christ and must be used under His guidance.<sup>12</sup>

Second, their motivations are different. Greenleaf's leader is driven by a natural human desire to see others succeed. The biblical leader is driven by *agape* love, which isn't just a natural feeling—it is a supernatural fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). It is a love that overflows from a relationship with God and is given to others as an act of worship. This kind of love pushes a leader to serve even when it isn't "natural" or easy, and to love people who are hard to love, reflecting God's own character.<sup>13</sup>

Third, they have different finish lines. Greenleaf's goal is to make people "healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous." These are wonderful, human-focused goals. But the goal of biblical servant leadership is deeply spiritual: it aims for the glory of God and the spiritual transformation of the follower. The point isn't just to help people become better versions of themselves, but to help them connect with God and become more like Christ (Romans 8:29). The growth is spiritual, the freedom is freedom from sin, and the wisdom is divine.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> S. Kim, M. Kim, and Y. Choi, Y, "Is Servant Leadership a 'Christian Theory'? A Critical Review of the Conceptual Overlap between Greenleaf's Servant Leadership and Biblical Servant Leadership" *Journal of Business Ethics*, 163 (2018), pp. 41–55.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Finally, they view the scope of service differently. For Greenleaf, serving means meeting people's "highest priority needs" at work or in society. For Jesus, serving meant giving His "life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). This truth adds a level of sacrifice and redemption that you just don't find in the secular model. The biblical servant-leader is called not just to empower people, but to suffer for and with them, following the example of the cross. While Greenleaf offers a great moral compass, the Bible offers a roadmap for redemption. It's not just about building a better company; it's about joining God's mission to restore the world.<sup>15</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Greenleaf's theory is a great secular companion to biblical servant leadership, but it is only a shadow of the real thing modeled by Christ. The biblical model is rooted in a divine calling, powered by supernatural love, and focused on eternal results. It has a depth that no purely human framework can match. The servant leadership modeled by Jesus is a breath of fresh air compared to the power-hungry models usually employed, and it goes much deeper than the well-meaning but spiritually limited secular model proposed by Greenleaf. Jesus's leadership is the total package: driven by the divine motivation of *agape* love, grounded in radical humility, and proven through hands-on, sacrificial service. This is very different from Greenleaf's model, which relies on a human desire to serve and aims only to make people healthier and more independent in this life. The biblical model comes from God, is powered by supernatural love, and aims for eternal spiritual redemption.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.



# **PART TWO**

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## The Practice of Church Administration





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## CHAPTER 5

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# DYNAMICS OF CHURCH ADMINISTRATION

The previous chapters have provided a biblical perspective of administrative ministry. As the theological foundations were explored, hopefully, the scriptural demonstration that orderly administration is essential for faithful stewardship of God's mission has replaced any view that administration is merely "busy work" that distracts from "spiritual ministry." Church administration, then, is not to be reduced to a secular management imported into the church, but the faithful stewardship of God's people, resources, and mission.

While a theological framework for administration is necessary, at some point one needs to fill that framework with an understanding of the practice of administration. In the introductory chapter, the following definition of church administration was provided:

Church Administration is the stewardship of God's resources for the faithful service of God's people rendered unto God and others on God's behalf to bring Him glory, build up His church, and reach the world in fulfillment of God's mission.

The enacting of this administration requires intentional strategy. In the broader field of organizational leadership, when "studying management...it is helpful to break it down into five managerial functions--planning, staffing, organizing, leading, and controlling..."<sup>1</sup> These func-

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Koontz and Heinz Weihrich, *Essentials of Management: An International Perspective*, 8<sup>th</sup> Ed. (New Delhi: Tata MacGraw Hill, 2010), p. 3.

tions, prominent in secular thinking, provide a helpful framework for understanding how churches may steward their ministries effectively. Nevertheless, for Christian pastors these principles must always be framed within a biblical theology of leadership, reflecting the model of servant leadership lived out by Jesus, as explored in the preceding chapter. Administrative ability without spiritual humility undermines pastoral ministry. Thus, the dynamics of church administration must integrate sound organizational practice with an attitude that reflects Christ-centered leadership. This chapter seeks to provide some foundational practices in exploring the dynamics of church administration by examining the five essential components: administrative planning, administrative staffing, administrative organizing, administrative leading, and administrative controlling. Together these elements provide a practical framework through which pastors can guide congregations toward faithful and effective ministry.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE PLANNING**

The foundational activity of administration is the act of planning. Planning involves the task of determining future objectives and identifying those actions which are necessary for the objectives to be achieved. Simply put, it is seeking to provide answers to the questions: “What do we need to do?” “How do we do it?” “When do we do it?” and “Who is to do it?”<sup>2</sup> Another way of stating “future objectives” is that one should consider the “end vision” to be achieved. What is the ultimate expression or goal of the activity? If one knows the desired outcome, it becomes easier to breakdown the elements needed to reach that outcome. From this perspective, then, the process of planning can be more important than the specific plans themselves. Planning facilitates ministry communication, vision-sharing, and team member interaction. These interpersonal processes fuel ministry progress and effectiveness. Planning is the catalyst for team accomplishment.

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<sup>2</sup> Koonz and Weihrich, p. 85.

## **Biblical Foundations for Planning**

While a thorough examination of the biblical foundations for administration has been conducted earlier in this volume, one can focus on the task of planning within biblical wisdom as well. Planning is not an outgrowth of a lack of faith; rather, it reflects stewardship and intentional obedience. In the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs highlights the wisdom of planning in contrast to foolish behavior. Planning is described in terms of diligence (Prov. 21:5); as connected to a commitment to the direction of the Lord (Prov. 16:3); requires good counsel (Prov. 15:22); but ultimately one's plans are subject to God, "Many plans are in a man's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail" (Prov. 19:21). Elsewhere, the psalmist requests for God to "Teach us to number our days carefully" to develop wisdom (Ps. 90:12). Jesus reflects the common understanding that planning is an expected, normal, and necessary part of life "For which of you, wanting to build a tower, doesn't first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it?" (Luke 14:28).

## **Strategic Planning in Church Ministry**

Church ministry should be driven intentionally by a desire to conform to God's desires. The Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), therefore, provides the foundational understanding of the mission of the church. Why? As Jesus states, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth..." Jesus has the right to direct the mission and activity of His people. Where? "Go..." The participle carries the idea that after going—wherever—one is to be directed by Jesus' commands. What? "...make disciples of all nations..." Jesus declares THE imperative of His people. How? "...baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you..." The two critical components of baptizing—leading people to a point of commitment to follow Jesus—and teaching to obey—equipping people to understand and act obediently—provide focus for the priority activity for the follower of Jesus. How long? "...to the end of the age." Revelation 7:9 provides an "end vision" of when the Great Commission is complete: "...and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the

Lamb.” Until that vision is realized, the church is directed by the command of Jesus to make disciples.

This perspective should drive the strategy and planning for the church as they intentionally align their ministries with this biblical mission instituted by Jesus. Note the word “intentionally.” If one does not move with intention, then usually one simply intends to move (and never really makes progress). As Malphurs notes, churches frequently operate based on tradition or habit rather than purposeful strategy; thus, without deliberate planning, congregations often drift into activity without purpose.<sup>3</sup> Strategic planning helps leaders identify priorities and focus their efforts on the most significant aspects of ministry.

Such intentional, strategic planning in practical ministry contexts involves several related elements.

First, it is imperative that leaders **clarify the mission**. While the Great Commission serves as the ongoing mission for every believer, the church needs a vision for what that looks like in their immediate context and ministry. Every aspect of the church life is examined in light of the mission of the church: worship, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, etc. This vision for the implementation of the Great Commission in the life and ministry of the church in the local context must be conveyed to the members often—with passion and clarity. Planning is the process of turning vision into reality. Planning is very much a partnership between the church and God. As a result, planning is both proactive (making things happen) and reactive (waiting for them to happen). The key challenge in planning is to maintain the right balance between acting and reacting—between human effort and divine intervention.

Planning should concentrate more on ministry effectiveness (doing the right things) than efficiency (doing things in the “right” way). This perspective means the planning process begins by clarifying the ministry’s basic mission (ultimate purpose), which is the very foundation of effectiveness. Only then can planning move forward—which it must—to encompass the other broad components of effectiveness: goals (specific outcomes to be attained by the ministry); strategy for

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<sup>3</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), pp. 23-25.

the specific context of ministry (the broad “game plan” for achieving those goals); and tactics (successful implementation of the game plan).

Second, one must **set objectives**. These objectives communicate the goals for the actions necessary to accomplish the mission of Christ in the local context. An important distinction that must be made is that the while objectives are necessary to define ministry activities, the goals for obtaining objectives **MUST** be driven by mission! In truth, one is to manage by *mission* not by *objective*. The goals discerned should be “SMART”: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant/realistic, and time-bound:

**Specific:** Clear, well-defined, definite (what is to be done; who is to do it; how are they to accomplish it)

**Measurable:** Use clear criteria to identify progress toward the completion of the goal

**Achievable:** realistically attainable by those involved

**Relevant (or Realistic):** connects to the stated mission and long-term objectives

**Time-bound:** a clear deadline for completion

Such SMART goals can be developed for every aspect of ministry including, evangelistic initiatives, discipleship training, leadership development, community engagement, etc.

Some people dread goal setting because goals make them feel conspicuous (“Everyone will know what I’m supposed to be doing and whether or not I succeed in doing it!”). Others have a negative reaction to goal setting because of past experiences with an insensitive minister who autocratically imposed goals on them or used goals as a whip to drive performance. Still others sneer at goals because they have seen their organization set goals every year and then quickly forget about them. The challenge of goal setting is not merely to formulate goals; it is to make goals, and the whole goal setting process, work for the organization and its members. Goals should be “friendly.” When managed effectively, the goal setting process works for the organization. Goals give people a sense of united purpose, channelling their energy in productive directions. Goals serve as performance standards, provid-

ing ministry team members with a rudder to guide daily job activities. Goals also let people know which ends and means will be endorsed and sanctioned by the organization. In the absence of strategic goals that provide clear steps to achieving ministry objectives, ministries must pay the price of slackened motivation, wasted energy, and inferior productivity. To say the least, goals are one of the most important items in any leader's tool kit!

As a final consideration on goals, one needs to realize the connection between well thought out goals that are mission driven and the ability to complete the objectives necessary to carry out mission in the local context. Goals must be “operational.” In other words, goals must express definitive actions to achieve meaningful ministry. Intentions are *not* goals! Many ministry leaders confuse having a sense of purpose for goal setting. Merely wanting something to be accomplished will not bring it about. An operational goal is a specific course of action that results in a measurable outcome. A goal is not operational unless it clearly specifies both ends and means. Review, again, the elements of a SMART goal mentioned above: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Well-formulated, SMART ministry goals energize team members for action by giving them a clear and exciting destination to which they are travelling and a road map they can follow. Operational goals point clearly to where the ministry is heading and how to recognize arrival at the final destination. Such goals show us how to start, how to measure progress, and when we have succeeded.

A third element of strategic planning is the need to **assess the context** of the church. Planning that is effective must consider the realities of the community. One must understand the demographics and the cultural dynamics. This step can only be accomplished through engagement with the community. The church must leave the confines of the gathering place and move among the people in the community. Prayer walking is a fantastic way to have a congregation begin to “see” their community. Consider actively mapping the community which discerns three layers:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Caleb Crider, “Mapping” in *Tradecraft for the Church on Mission* (Portland, OR: Urban Loft Publishers, 2013), pp. 50-66.

- **Geographic layer:** mapping the space of the community: what is the physical layout of the community and how does that impact the development of the community. Identify pathways into the community, edges of the community, nodes where activity occurs in the community, sub-districts within the community, and landmarks recognized by the community.<sup>5</sup>
- **Social layer:** mapping the story of the community: where do people gather; who is gathering; why are they gathering; when are they gathering.<sup>6</sup>
- **Spiritual layer:** mapping God's activity: what religious institutions are present; which are engaged with the community; where is God moving in the community.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The geographic layer is essential to understand the development of a community. The paths by which people travel in and out of a community give insight into both the mobility of the members of a community as well as the ease of engagement with other communities. Identifying the edges/boundaries of a community is critical for the church. Too often the church simply expects people to cross boundaries and come to them when it is the job of the follower of Jesus to go. Identifying those nodes where people can gather provide insight into the reasonable possibilities for interaction with a community. Sub-districts refer to those locations of specific identity within a larger community, i.e. the business district. (For expanded definitions and descriptions see *Ibid.*, pp. 52-61).

<sup>6</sup> When mapping the social layer of a community, it is critical to consider the changes that occur at different times of the day. What may be a business district during the day could be a nightclub/social district at night. Consider at least three different times for mapping: business hours; evening; late night/early morning. (For definitions and descriptions see *Ibid.*, pp. 61-63).

<sup>7</sup> Think of the spiritual layer as a prayer guide. The easiest component of the spiritual layer is to identify every church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or other place of worship in the community. A slightly more difficult element is identifying the effective connection those places of worship have with the community. Are there weekday events or programming? Are there community outreach or helps happening? In other words, one is trying to understand if the religious institution has any real connection or impact on the community. Finally, one is seeking to discern God's direction for the church in that community. Are there places of "darkness" without any influence from churches? As one is prayer walking, where does God keep leading the disciple to engage? (For definitions and further description, see *Ibid.*, pp 63-64)

Mapping is not the end itself, but can inform a proper “exegesis” of the community as one seeks to understand four aspects of the community identity:<sup>8</sup>

- **Story:** every community has a story—a narrative that has shaped life in that community<sup>9</sup>
- **Space:** how is space used—the organization, maintenance, and priority of space<sup>10</sup>
- **Idols:** what is the object of desire, value, or pursuit of those living in the community<sup>11</sup>
- **Conflict:** what are the areas of struggle in the community<sup>12</sup>

For strategic planning to be effective, one must understand the context in which one ministers.

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<sup>8</sup> Caleb Crider, “Exegeting Culture” in *Tradecraft for the Church on Mission* (Portland, OR: Urban Loft Publishers, 2013), pp. 67-83.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 73-75. Hear the story from the people living in the community instead of hearing about the community.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 75-79. The use of space can reveal a lot about the priorities of a community. For example, the prevalence of parks or playgrounds often notes a high value on nurturing family. One key item to consider is the evidence of change. Is space being reclaimed or reused? Are homes being repurposed for business? Are open spaces used for housing. These markers give insight into the priorities, growth points, and health of a community. How is the upkeep? Does the community have a concern for the maintenance and care of the shared spaces? How visible is security both for residences and businesses?

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-81. Community idols are rarely physical structures; rather, they are often seen as the driving goal or ambition of community members. What is seen as the functional saviors—materialism, sex, power, wealth, education (the shrines to these idols are everywhere—malls, billboards, arenas). Idols can be wrapped up in a culture’s values.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., pp. 81-82. Conflicts arise when something challenges someone’s values. Look for signs of conflict—what is the source and look to how the community handles conflict. Conflict can be obvious such as violence or aggression or more subtle and marked by guilt, shame, fear, hate, prejudice.

A final element of strategic planning is the need to **implement ministry strategies** based upon the mission, objectives, and context. One must move from theory to practice as the SMART goals are enacted. This step requires some delegation so that leaders are identified for each initiative.

A word of caution should be mentioned, however, as one can become focused on management by objective instead of management by mission. “Management by objectives” (MBO) is a familiar concept to most managers, even if they’ve never used it intentionally. MBO is a formal, written process designed to involve subordinates in goal setting and hold them accountable for their performance. Ministry managers would be wise to use MBO with discretion, however, since it is easily abused. This occurrence stems from MBO’s fundamental emphasis on performance. Under a typical MBO system, people are valued more for what they *do* than for who they *are*. Obviously, performance is vitally important to all organizations, but should it be the driving force of Christian ministries? Christians are called to value people for who they are (spiritually), not merely for what they produce (economically). This distinction is not always easy to maintain in a more materialistic focused culture, yet it is essential that ministers view team members as more than mere factors of production. Honestly, objective driven management is often easier than engaging in mission driven management as one can avoid deeper personal engagement in favor of surface evaluation. “Management by mission” (MBM) is an alternative to management by objectives focusing on the unique niches occupied by members of the ministry team. People are valued because of their special place in the ministry “family,” not merely because they achieve goals and meet deadlines. Belonging is emphasized along with producing, although producing is a natural byproduct of belonging. This approach will be developed further below in the consideration of administrative staffing.

In the context of pastoral ministry, planning involves clarifying the church’s mission, determining ministry priorities, and identifying the steps necessary to fulfill those priorities in a manner that is relevant to the local context. Pastors who neglect planning often find themselves responding to immediate demands rather than “...the training of the saints in the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the

faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into a mature man with a stature measured by Christ's fullness." (Eph. 4:12-13).

### **Planning as Spiritual Discernment**

While planning does require careful analysis and intentional engagement, one must hear again the reminder from Proverbs 19:21: "Many plans are in a man's heart, but the LORD's decree will prevail." Church administration is not a secular exercise; rather, for pastors, planning must be a prayerful exercise! Planning must always be accompanied by prayerful discernment. Christian leaders should seek God's guidance. The pastor should lead the people in prayerful engagement to discern God's vision for the carrying out of the Great Commission in the local context. Planning becomes both an intellectual and a spiritual process. This imperative can be seen throughout Scripture. As Joshua leads the people into the promise land, he leads the people in renewing covenant in the land (see Joshua 5). He also seeks time apart to discern God's direction (5:13f; 7:6f). In the book of Acts, one finds that as the church faced major decisions in carrying out the mission of God, they proceeded with discussions and prayerful reliance on the guidance of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 13 and 15 as examples). Strategic planning that seeks to help the church live out the mission of God in their context must be continually surrendered to God.

### **Planning Personnel: Who should be Involved in Planning?**

Who should be a part of the planning process? A simple rule of thumb can be utilized: those directly affected by ministry plans should be involved in the planning. Many ministers see planning in a more limited way, preferring to involve as few people as possible to expedite time efficiency and minimize conflict. The resulting "top down" planning approach does proceed efficiently, but rarely effectively. Over time, the myopic top-down, or unilateral, planning will sadly discover that lack of team participation inevitably leads to lack of commitment! Top-down, or unilateral, planning places too much emphasis on developing plans and not enough on implementing them. Yet planning success rests more with how plans are implemented than with how they are conceived. Plans "hatched" in isolation stand little chance of being

enthusiastically and thoughtfully implemented. The strategic move from concept to action requires more voices in the planning process.

Bilateral (or two-way) planning, involving continuous dialogue between ministry leaders and team members, is much more likely to succeed because it nurtures a fertile planning climate: listening, learning, compromising, clarifying, encouraging, and challenging. When team members work together in formulating plans, they will also work together in *implementing* them. Both the “content” and process dimensions of planning can thus be satisfied.

Just as there are different roles on the ministry team, there are different roles for team members to play in the planning process. Certain members will be information providers, others will be information processors, still others will share and disseminate information. Some will provide technical expertise in planning, others will use interpersonal and persuasive skills, while others will “troubleshoot” implementation activities. Ministry leaders should do everything possible to make team members feel uniquely useful in planning for ministry success. In this way, they will feel they “own” the ministry plan and are personally accountable for its success.

## ADMINISTRATIVE STAFFING

While one should acknowledge that “staffing” in a church context varies greatly from church to church, the need for staffing is a reality in every church. While planning establishes the direction of ministry and identifies the specific goals to be accomplished, staffing ensures that qualified individuals are available to carry out that work. “Administrative staffing,” thus, can be understood as focused on ensuring that an organization has the necessary *human* resources to fulfill its mission. In a church context, administrative staffing must be understood not merely as the oversight of a managerial process but as a stewardship responsibility that supports the ministry of the church enabling the church to engage in the mission of God effectively in its local context. As a component of church administration, staffing reflects the aspect of spiritual stewardship that involves discerning, developing, and deploying people whom God has gifted for ministry in the local church. For most churches, “staff” is composed of volunteers who are en-

gaged in serving the church and leading ministries as a part of faithful obedience to God. Nevertheless, one is not simply looking for “bodies” to fill a role because there is a need; rather, the desire is to fill the roles with people who bring that role to life because of their God-given gifting, especially for the volunteer staff.

In the task of staffing, the critical nature of viewing the church as an “organized organism” can be readily noted. On the one hand, the church requires systems and personnel to manage finances, coordinate ministries, and administer programs, but on the other hand the church is the body of Christ composed of believers who are empowered to serve having been given spiritual gifts by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, staffing often reflects the task of discipleship as leaders are directed to equip members for service; therefore, one must integrate sound administrative principles with biblical theology. Church leaders must recognize that the effectiveness of ministry often depends on the quality and development of those who serve within the church’s organizational structure. Within the framework of church administration, therefore, administrative staffing involves identifying personnel—both paid employees/ministers and volunteers—who can support both the church’s ministries and the operational activities. Churches often rely on the staff and volunteers working together to fulfill the mission of God in the local context as discerned by pastoral leadership—the mobilization and coordination of gifted members of the congregation is of critical importance. Additionally, administrative efficiency in staffing enables pastors and ministry leaders to focus on their primary spiritual responsibilities. As Welch notes in his work on church administration, efficient administrative systems help free ministry leaders to concentrate on preaching, teaching, and pastoral care rather than becoming overwhelmed by operational concerns.<sup>13</sup> Effective staffing therefore contributes directly to the spiritual mission of the church.

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<sup>13</sup> Robert H. Welch, *Church Administration: Creating Efficiency for Effective Ministry* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2005), see his discussion how effective administrative structures support ministry leadership rather than burden it in his chapter on administering the office, chapter 8, pages 231-240 in particular.

## **Biblical and Theological Foundations for Administrative Staffing**

In previous chapters, the biblical foundation for administration has been examined. In the specific task of staffing, one can find several passages that highlight the importance of the task. For the sake of space, three examples will be considered.

The appointment of deacons in Acts 6:1-7 provides the clearest example from the early church. When a dispute arose regarding the distribution of food to widows, the apostles recognized that the growing ministry required additional leadership structures. They instructed the congregation to appoint seven qualified individuals to oversee the task. This event illustrates several key administrative principles relevant to the task of staffing: recognizing organizational needs; delegating responsibility; selecting qualified leaders. The process not only addressed the immediate needs of the congregation but also allowed the ministry of the apostles to continue unhindered. As a result of this organizational decision, the ministry of the church expanded: “So the preaching about God flourished, the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly...” (Acts 6:7).

The remaining examples to be considered both relate to the nature of the church as body. Of initial focus is the understanding of each member as a part of the body ((Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12:4-27). The Holy Spirit reveals that ministry is inherently collaborative, involving many members working together under Christ’s direction as head. This reality demands that staffing within the church involves recognizing and stewarding the spiritual gifts God has given to believers. A secondary, and equally important, focus is the understanding of the purpose and role of leaders within the body. In Eph 4:11-12, the Holy Spirit gives the mandate for leadership “for training of the saints in the work of ministry.” This focus reminds the disciple that church staffing should align with the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20)—the mission of the church to advance the gospel. The goal of leadership is the development and mobilization of the entire body for service “until we all each unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God’s son” (Eph 4:13a).

In advancing the view that administrative staffing within the church must be approached from such theological perspectives, Malphurs, in discussing the need for more team-based ministry and empowerment of leaders, argues that “Effective church leadership re-

quires the development of ministry teams in which leaders empower others to serve within defined areas of responsibility.”<sup>14</sup> In such an approach, leadership involves equipping and empowering others rather than concentrating authority in a single individual.

## **The Process of Administrative Staffing in the Church**

The challenge of overseeing staffing within the context of the local church involves several interconnected steps: human resource planning, recruiting, training, and retaining.<sup>15</sup> Attention should be given to each element to help build an effective ministry team within the local church.

### *Human Resource Planning in the Local Church*

The first task of administrative staffing is the determination of the actual personnel needs of the church. The determination can only be carried out effectively after the completed strategic planning. Human resource planning considers the tasks identified in the strategic plan as necessary to accomplish the church’s mission and identifies the specific skills required to perform those tasks effectively. By aligning staffing decisions—both paid and voluntary—with the church’s mission and vision, leaders ensure that personnel resources support the broader objectives of the congregation. Some typical questions that surface as a part of such analysis may include some of the following:

- What ministries require leadership or administrative support?
- What roles should be filled by volunteers, and which require paid staff?

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<sup>14</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *Leading Leaders: Empowering Church Boards for Ministry Excellence* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), p. 128.

<sup>15</sup> Some variation of these elements can be noted in various sources. These elements have been chosen as most relevant for the church context. A foundational resource that is often quoted on the subject is Dalton E. McFarland, *Management: Foundations and Practices* (New York: Macmillan, 1974). In the broader management discussions, Koonz has written with several authors on administration theory: most notably with Weihrich, *Essentials of Management*; but previously with O’Donnell, *Principles of Management* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976). In the area of Church administration, Welch is one of the most well-known.

- What skills and spiritual qualifications are necessary for each position?
- What type of training will be required to help the personnel succeed in the role?
- What are the most pressing needs of the church that must be addressed?
- What type of staff is needed to achieve the long-term vision of the church?

Careful analysis of these questions helps pastors and church leaders avoid staffing decisions based *solely* on immediate pressures. While immediate pressing needs must be addressed, the church cannot exist in a strictly reactive state of staffing. Instead, staffing must become a strategic process with an understanding of the needs to be addressed to be effective in the ongoing, long-term mission and ministry of the church. This process should involve some evaluation of the current ministries, workloads, and projections of growth. Changes in community or culture may impact needs for a congregation. The rapid growth of online engagement by a target community, for example, may determine ministry strategies and personnel needs. Similarly, a growing congregation may require more support in areas such as finance, facility care, or communications.

### *Recruitment and Selection of Church Staff*

Once staffing needs have been identified, the next step involves recruiting and selecting individuals who can fill those roles. In considering church staff, this chapter is not concerned with the call of the pastor; rather, the recruiting of the staff—both paid and volunteer—that will be under the leadership of the pastor. In the church context, the initial point of concern must be spiritual qualifications (**character**) over simple competency. Regardless of the role—from leading a ministry to overseeing maintenance—those filling roles within the church must demonstrate a vibrant spiritual relationship with Christ. As passages such as 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 emphasize the importance of character, spiritual maturity, and integrity in those who serve in ministry *leadership* roles, these qualities remain essential considerations when selecting all church staff members. Once again, for most church-

es, these staff members will be volunteer based; however, one must still approach the task with prayerful diligence.

At the same time, roles require skills that correspond to the responsibilities. Church administrators, financial officers, and ministry coordinators must possess organizational skills, communication abilities, and knowledge relevant to their responsibilities. Effective staffing therefore requires balancing spiritual discernment with careful evaluation of skills and experience (**competency**).

A third area of concern is noted by Charles Tidwell who recommends that church staff members should be selected not only for their individual abilities but also for their **compatibility**, i.e., their ability to work within the church's mission, philosophy of ministry, and leadership structure.<sup>16</sup> Both paid and voluntary staff members must function as part of a unified ministry team rather than as isolated individuals following personal agendas. While this aspect may feel more difficult when leading volunteers due to the need for workers in the church, the ability to create a team understanding is critical to healthy ministry.

An area that is not explicitly noted by Tidwell but is of great importance is an understanding of **calling**. The foundation for any service is the call of God. One can recognize four types of calling for the

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<sup>16</sup> Charles A. Tidwell, *Church Administration: Effective Leadership for Ministry* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1985), p. 114. Tidwell highlights three “Cs” of staffing recruitment: **Competence**—skills and training necessary for the ministry role; **Compatibility**—alignment with the church's mission and leadership style of the pastor and staff; and **Cooperation within structure**—the ability to function within the church's administrative and leadership framework. As discussed below, one should add a fourth C in staff recruitment—**Calling**.

disciple: a call to salvation,<sup>17</sup> a call to mission,<sup>18</sup> a call to station,<sup>19</sup> and a call to service.<sup>20</sup> In the context of the dynamic of the staffing process, every disciple is called to mission, but certain disciples are called to specific acts of service in fulfilling that mission in the local context. Calling is critical! Without calling, the ministry quickly becomes task-oriented rather than missional stewardship.

In summary, the selection process involves evaluating candidates to determine whether they possess the necessary competencies, character, and compatibility with the church's mission and culture —undergirded by a sense of calling from God—to serve in the local church context. Effective selection processes typically include prayerfully reviewing

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<sup>17</sup> International Mission Board, *Foundations*, Version 4 (Richmond: IMB, 2022), p. 84: “First and foremost, calling is the gracious act of God by which He draws people to become disciples of Jesus and members of His church. The call to salvation comes through the proclamation of God’s Word in the power of God’s Spirit. Accompanying the call to salvation in Christ is a call to freedom, holiness, and suffering in Christ. The call to salvation forms the unshakeable foundation of a disciple’s primary identity now and forever.”

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.: “The call to salvation includes a call to mission, for every person who responds to God’s call receives Christ’s command to make disciples of Jesus. Discipleship is thus the God-given, Christ-enabled, Spirit empowered duty of every disciple whatever his or her station, location, or vocation. In this way, every disciple plays an integral part in the eternal purpose of God to glorify His name through disciples made in every nation.”

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.: “Christ calls disciples to specific stations in and through which they exalt Him on mission. One such station is within the family, where Christians are called to be faithful sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, and mothers and fathers for the spread of God’s gospel and the display of God’s glory. Scripture also speaks of a divine call to singleness for the sake of mission, either for a period or for the entirety of one’s life in this world. Other calls to specific stations include Christ’s call to meaningful membership in His church and responsible citizenship in one’s community.” (pp. 84-85).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: “...calling is the gracious act of God by which He directs disciples to make disciples in a certain way, at a certain time, among a certain people, in a certain location, or through a certain vocation. Calls to service may be fluid, operating at varying levels and open to varying assignments from God. A disciple’s life, however, must be constant in faithfulness to God’s call, no matter the cost, until God calls the disciple to a different service. Calls to service are discerned and affirmed in community, as a member of the church on mission in the world through Spirit-led, Word-driven, prayer-focused examination of a disciple’s desires, gifts, abilities, and opportunities.” (p. 85).

qualifications, conducting interviews, and seeking references. In ministry contexts, spiritual maturity and commitment to the church's doctrinal beliefs are essential considerations alongside competencies. As poor selection decisions can have significant consequences for the church's effectiveness, leaders must approach recruitment and selection prayerfully and thoughtfully, recognizing the importance of placing the right individual in each role.

### *Training and Development of Staff and Volunteers in the Church*

Staffing does not end with the appointment of personnel. Effective administration requires ongoing training and development to ensure that staff continues to grow in their roles. As the majority of "staff" in most churches are voluntary, the need for ongoing strategic training and development is critical for the growth of the volunteer as well as the health of the church.

Initially, some form of orientation—whether formal or informal—is necessary to help new staff members understand the church's policies, procedures, and ministry philosophy. Ongoing development may include specific skills training provided by the church, formal education through an institution, or spiritual formation opportunities within the context of the church. The staff should be discipled as other members of the church in addition to ministry specific training.

In considering the need of leaders, Malphurs and Mancini, arguing that churches must intentionally cultivate leaders throughout the ministry structure so that leadership responsibility multiplies and ministry capacity expands, conclude that the true test of leadership is whether leaders train other leaders who can sustain and expand the church's ministry by equipping individuals to assume greater responsibility over time.<sup>21</sup> When leaders invest in developing others, the church becomes more resilient and capable of sustaining long-term ministry growth.

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<sup>21</sup> Aubrey Malphurs and Will Mancini, *Building Leaders: Blueprints for Developing Leadership at Every Level of your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), pp. 10-11. In the opening chapter, "Leaders, Who Needs Them?" the authors respond to the reality of a "leadership crisis" in many churches by emphatically challenging pastors to "develop committed leaders at every level within the organization" (p. 10).

Training is particularly important in volunteer-driven organizations such as churches. Volunteers often possess strong commitment but may lack formal preparation for ministry roles. By providing guidance and training, church leaders can help volunteers serve more effectively and with greater confidence. The church, therefore, must plan regular, ongoing training. One help is to create a curriculum for ministry and ensure that every volunteer and staff member move through the relevant training.

### *Supervision and Evaluation for Retaining Leaders*

Retention of leadership should be a priority consideration in church staffing. Frequent turnover can disrupt ministry continuity and create instability within the congregation. Leadership must proactively engage with their leaders purposefully with an eye toward continued ministry. While ongoing training provides skills, success requires proper supervision and healthy evaluation processes.

Meaningful supervision helps the larger leadership staff to “keep the main thing the main thing.” Staff members require clear expectations, regular feedback, and accountability structures that promote healthy ministry practices. Regular meetings designed to cast vision of the mission of the church and to provide clear guidance in carrying out that mission is necessary. Even for volunteers, regular planning meetings under the direction of a coordinator provides encouragement and confidence.

Similarly, performance evaluations provide an opportunity to assess effectiveness, identify areas for improvement, and encourage professional growth. Evaluation is always more difficult with volunteers, but no less necessary. Constructive evaluation should focus not only on task performance but also on relational dynamics, teamwork, and alignment with the church’s mission.

Proper supervision and evaluation require clear goals and objectives (strategic planning) and proper training. Evaluation should not be limited to the individual performance but also provide opportunity to reflect on the organizational progress in its stated mission. One mission organization has “guide” conversations with every team member. The purpose is to help the members evaluate their progress in both individual goals as well as overall progress of the team toward the mission tasks.

## **Uniqueness of Staffing in the Local Church**

The local church environment is somewhat unique when considering administrative staffing. More specifically one needs to be aware of three variable aspects: staffing structures, staffing and the role of volunteers, and the role of the pastoral leadership in staffing concerns.

### *Staffing Structures in the Local Church*

Churches typically develop staffing structures that reflect their size, resources, and ministry priorities. Smaller congregations often rely heavily on volunteers and part-time staff, while larger churches may employ specialized administrative personnel. Administrative roles commonly found in churches include some form of financial officers and an administrative assistant. The focus of such leaders is usually around the challenges of maintaining the logistic needs of the church. Ministry leaders are usually organized according to areas of ministry: music, age-related ministries such as children or youth, education or discipleship, evangelism, outreach, etc. Oversight and direction are necessary for both the volunteer and the paid ministry leaders. Regardless of the size of the church, clear role definitions and lines of accountability are essential. Organizational clarity helps prevent confusion and ensures that staff members understand their responsibilities and reporting relationships.

### *Staffing and the Role of Volunteers*

One distinctive feature of church administration is the critical role of volunteers as churches, unlike secular organizations, rely heavily on volunteerism for ministry activities. In truth, most of the staffing at churches is volunteer; therefore, church leaders must be effective in recruiting, developing, and retaining volunteers.

While volunteer leadership correctly reflects the biblical principle of the priesthood of all believers and every Christian is called to participate in the work of ministry, the expectations placed upon a volunteer are not the same as upon paid staff. Nevertheless, the church functions most effectively when members actively use their spiritual gifts; therefore, volunteerism is an appropriate expression of worship and service. Volunteers often require more overt appreciation with clear expectations and supportive supervision to help ensure that volunteer min-

istries function effectively and harmoniously within the broader organizational structure of the church.

A challenge that is important to recognize is the need to manage properly the relationship between volunteers and paid staff. Coordinating volunteer efforts requires careful leadership and clear communication. Additionally, churches must address issues related to conflict resolution, staff morale, and organizational changes with volunteers as well as paid staff.

### *The Role of Pastoral Leadership in Staffing*

Pastors often face the challenge of balancing pastoral responsibilities with administrative oversight. Even if a church employs administrators to oversee operational matters, the senior pastor remains a central figure in the staffing process. Pastors often play a key role in identifying ministry needs, selecting staff members, and shaping the culture of the leadership team. While administrative staffing helps alleviate some of these pressures, pastors must still provide leadership and direction for the administrative team. Effective administrative staffing ultimately depends on the leadership of the pastor and church leadership team.

Healthy pastoral leadership emphasizes collaboration, accountability, and servant leadership. When the right individuals serve in the right roles, administrative systems support rather than hinder the work of the church. Pastors must view leadership as a process of equipping others rather than performing all ministry tasks personally. Malphurs explains that leadership in the church involves guiding and equipping people so that ministry responsibilities are shared by a team of leaders rather than concentrated in the pastor alone.<sup>22</sup> By empowering a team of capable leaders and delegating administrative responsibilities, pastors can devote greater attention to preaching, teaching, discipleship, and pastoral care.

## **Conclusion**

Administrative staffing is a critical component of church administration that directly impacts the effectiveness of ministry. Through careful planning, thoughtful recruitment, ongoing development, and support-

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<sup>22</sup> Aubrey Malphurs, *The Dynamics of Church Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), pp. 44-45.

ive leadership, churches can build ministry teams that advance the mission of the gospel. Administrative staffing utilizing by both sound management principles and biblical theology is a powerful step for strengthening the ministry of the local church.

## ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZING

If planning identifies *what* must be accomplished and staffing identifies *who* must be involved to accomplish the goals, organizing determines *how* those objectives will be pursued. Organizing draws together the human, physical, and financial resources of the church into a cohesive structure capable of accomplishing ministry goals. Welch describes the process of administrative organizing in the church as arranging people and resources so that ministry can be carried out effectively and efficiently.<sup>23</sup> As a means of exploring the task of administrative organizing in the context of the local church, one can consider the organizational structure of the church, revisit a biblical model for insight, and examine into the organizing of resources.

### The Nature of the Organizational Structure of the Local Church

Organization is often misunderstood as rigidity. Organization in its simplest terms, however, refers to the arrangement of resources and responsibilities so that work can be accomplished efficiently. Though not addressing the church context, Drucker while explaining the role of management and organizational structure famously stated: “The purpose of organization is to make human strengths productive and human weaknesses irrelevant.”<sup>24</sup> The point being that leaders should not expect perfect individuals but instead build teams where the strengths of one member compensate for the limitations of another.

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<sup>23</sup> Welch, Church Administration, pp. 27-31.

<sup>24</sup> Peter F. Drucker, *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), p. 84. Regarding the task of administrative organizing, Drucker will argue that the effective leader should staff for strengths realizing that the goal of organizing is to combine strengths, and increase performance through complimentary abilities of the staff. See also Drucker's book *The Effective Executive* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), pp. 60-67.

In the context of the local church, organization will include many different critical tasks:

- Defining ministry roles
- Establishing leadership structures
- Allocating financial resources
- Coordinating volunteer staff and paid staff
- Structuring ministry programs

Every church, whether intentionally designed or not, possesses some form of organizational structure to engage with the various tasks. This structure defines leadership roles, ministry responsibilities, and lines of accountability. A healthy church organization typically includes pastoral leadership; lay leadership teams or elders; ministry leaders; volunteer teams; and administrative and financial oversight. Effective organization ensures that responsibilities are clearly defined and that ministry efforts are coordinated rather than duplicated.

While churches operate through a variety of organizational structures depending on their size and ministry context, several basic organizational principles remain constant. The pastor must be able to provide clear lines of responsibility and accountability. Effective communication must be maintained throughout the ministry process—from providing tasks, reporting on progress, or giving feedback. If those principles are in place, the pastor can better coordinate among ministries so that each staff has a clear scope and area of ministry that moves alongside other staff and ministries. A final step must be the appropriate delegation of authority—clearly identifying those overseeing the various ministries of the church. These principles enable leaders to guide the work of the church while empowering others to serve.

### **Case Study from the Early Church: Acts 6:1-7**

Although briefly referenced above, consider again one of the best examples from Scripture of administrative organizing in practice—the narrative of the appointment of the first deacons. In Acts 6, one reads of one of the first conflicts in the early church when a complaint was

raised “by the Hellenistic Jews against the Hebraic Jews”<sup>25</sup> because they believed that “their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution.”<sup>26</sup> The apostles summoned the whole company of disciples and charged them with the selection of “seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and wisdom.”<sup>27</sup> These men were to oversee the duty of the daily distribution of food to the widows so that the apostles were able to continue to “devote themselves to prayer and to the preaching ministry.”<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that the apostles did not make the appointments; rather, the gathered disciples made the selections. The role of the gathered disciples, i.e. “congregation”, in the organizational structure should not be minimized or overlooked. In this narrative, the recommendation was well-received, men were appointed by the gathered disciples to the satisfaction of all, support to the widows continued, the ministry of the apostles was unhindered, and “the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied...”<sup>29</sup>

This passage illustrates several key administrative principles. First, the leaders *recognized the organizational needs*. Not only did the widows have need of the daily distribution, but the church also had need of staff to oversee the task. Second, having recognized the need, the apostles *delegated responsibility*. They cast vision to the company of disciples and gave them the task of finding seven men. The apostles realized what was needed and charged the disciples with finding the who to oversee the distribution. Third, they selected and *appointed qualified leaders*. Note that the primary qualification wasn’t the ability to distribute food, but their character (men of good reputation and known for wisdom) and their relationship with God (full of the Holy Spirit). The skills were secondary. Finally, through the actions taken, they were able to *protect the primary responsibilities* of the apostles. These four principles—recognize needs; delegate responsibility, select qualified leaders, and keep the main thing the main thing—provide a good pattern for enacting administrative organizing.

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<sup>25</sup> Acts 6:1.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Acts 6:3.

<sup>28</sup> Acts 6:4.

<sup>29</sup> Acts 6:7.

## Stewardship of Church Resources

Organization also involves responsible stewardship of the church's physical, financial, and human resources. Welch emphasizes that effective church administration integrates all available resources—people, finances, and facilities—into a coordinated system that advances ministry goals.<sup>30</sup> When resources are properly organized, the church becomes better equipped to fulfill its calling. As the organizing of human resources was engaged in the consideration of administrative staffing above,<sup>31</sup> one can focus on the physical and financial resources.

Transparency in the use of financial resources within the church is critical. Transparent financial practices and clear accountability structures protect both the integrity of leadership and the trust of the congregation. Just as critical as the handling and use of finances is the allocation of financial resources. A church's budget reflects the church's priorities. Responsible stewardship of facilities and finances requires that the mission of the church in its local context is supported and advanced in the manner of budgeting and spending. Church budgets must be designed with prayerful planning and oversight.

## ADMINISTRATIVE LEADING

If planning defines the goals, staffing provides partners, and organizing structures the work, leading ensures that people are inspired and guided toward accomplishing those goals. Leadership provides the direction and motivation necessary for ministry to move forward. John Maxwell famously defines leadership as *influence*—the ability to move people toward a shared vision—noting that “the true measure of leadership is

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<sup>30</sup> Welch, *Church Administration*, p. 87.

<sup>31</sup> In particular, the discussion on staffing highlighted the reality that much of its work of the church is carried out by volunteers; therefore, pastors must focus heavily on identifying and mobilizing the gifts of believers. As every believer is empowered by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts and has a role in the body of Christ (Rom. 12:4–8; 1 Cor. 12: 12–27), effective organization allows those gifts to be expressed in meaningful ministry.

influence—nothing more, nothing less.”<sup>32</sup> Maxwell proceeds to explain three critical truths about leadership:<sup>33</sup>

- Leadership is not determined by position or title.
- Real leadership is recognized when people choose to follow someone because of their influence.
- Influence grows through character, relationships, and credibility, not authority alone.

In popular terms, there has been a global shift from hard power to soft power—power that is earned, not assumed. In pastoral ministry this influence arises through preaching, teaching, example, and relational credibility. Within the context of the local church, the pastor provides administrative leading in casting vision, equipping the saints, and maintaining character and integrity.

## Vision and Direction

Effective leaders articulate a compelling vision for the church. As mentioned above, vision is closely related to mission. For every church, the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) commanded by Jesus provides the mission. Vision provides clarity about how and where mission is carried out in its local context *and* why its mission matters. Barna defines “vision” as “a clear mental picture of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants.”<sup>34</sup> The act of relating this vision to others can be termed “vision casting.”

In *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution*, Steve Smith and Ying Kai describe vision casting as a crucial motivational practice within the disciple-making process that continually calls believers to participate in God’s mission of multiplying disciples and churches.<sup>35</sup> The purpose of vision casting is encouragement and motivation. Because disciple-making is an

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<sup>32</sup> John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), p. 32.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. See chapter 2, “The Law of Influence”, pp. 11-22.

<sup>34</sup> George Barna, *The Power of Vision* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1992), p. 28.

<sup>35</sup> Steve Smith and Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship Re-Revolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011), p. 175.

ongoing call and workers can often encounter discouragement and opposition, regular vision reminders encourage perseverance and help believers maintain a kingdom perspective on their work. Vision casting reminds the church of heavenly realities—that God can transform lives and communities.<sup>36</sup> Think of vision casting like a “holy pep rally” that renews commitment and faith in God’s mission.<sup>37</sup> The authors further argue that vision casting must be frequent, concise, and reproducible, ensuring that the missionary impulse becomes embedded in the culture of the group.<sup>38</sup> Smith and Kai therefore incorporate vision casting into *every* training session, using biblical themes such as the Great Commission, the Father’s desire for the salvation of the lost, the expectation that every believer can participate in disciple reproduction within his or her relational network, or short testimonies and stories designed to communicate what God can do “in and through believers.”<sup>39</sup> Through this continual reinforcement, vision casting becomes a catalytic practice that aligns church members’ expectations with God’s mission.

The ability to convey directional vision to others, therefore, should be viewed as critical to leading. Pastors who communicate vision effectively help congregations unite around shared ministry priorities.

## **Equipping the Saints**

As mentioned above, Ephesians 4:11-12 clearly defines the purpose of leaders within the church as the “training of the saints for the work of ministry...” Administrative leading, then, must prioritize the training of the member of the church. Rather than performing every task themselves, effective pastors empower others to serve according to their spiritual gifts. This approach not only multiplies ministry impact but also strengthens the spiritual maturity of the congregation.

Equipping does not simply refer to the act of training itself but should incorporate multiple strategies. Yes, formal and informal training

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 175-176.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. In arguing for the use of vision casting in every meeting, the authors note that short reminders are often more effective than occasional long sermons. Furthermore, repetition helps believers internalize the mission and persist despite challenges (p. 176)

opportunities must be planned and implemented; however, equipping can involve other elements. One of the more often neglected forms of equipping is mentoring emerging leaders. Every leader should engage with a “Timothy” in ministry just as Paul poured into the life of Timothy so that he was fully equipped to engage in ministry and mentor others. One pastor of a thriving urban church in Nairobi shared that he did not engage in any ministry without taking someone with him. He identified potential leaders at varying levels and involved them in everything from visitation to instructing them in sermon/Bible study preparation. Too often pastors miss out on potential equipping moments by carrying out ministry solo. In the Church Planting Methodology course at the Cape Town Baptist Seminary, the students are required to identify a Timothy and involve them in every aspect of starting a new Bible study: prayer walking, evangelism, finding a house of peace, forming discipleship groups, preparing and leading Bible studies. Once this requirement was instituted, not only was the success in starting new Bible studies improved, but many of the “Timothys” were able to reproduce the ministry in new areas—and identifying their own “Timothy.” Intentional mentoring can have incredible lasting impact and results.

Additionally, equipping the saints should involve practices mentioned in administrative staffing above: evaluation and feedback; ongoing training, etc. A goal for the leader is to foster spiritual growth in members as they obey the commands of Christ. Leadership in the church is therefore fundamentally developmental. Its goal is not the concentration of authority but the multiplication of ministry.

## **Character and Integrity**

A final note of administrative leading involves the personal accountability of the leader. As mentioned above, when listing qualifications for leaders in 1 Timothy and Titus, almost every qualification was on character—moral integrity and spiritual maturity—rather than competency.<sup>40</sup> This emphasis reminds pastors that effective leadership flows from a life shaped by the gospel.

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<sup>40</sup> For example, in the list of qualifications for an elder, the only competency mentioned is “an able teacher” (1 Tim 3:2).

One practice that can aid a pastor in their own spiritual growth is making sure to “abide” with Christ. In the middle of the upper room discourse with his disciples as recorded in John 13-17, Jesus calls his disciples to abide in him. In John 15:1-8, Jesus highlights his relationship with his disciples as a vine to the branch. He commands them to “remain in Me” (v. 4) because “just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me.” (v. 4). This abiding in Christ is more than a quick prayer moment or even Bible reading, it is an intentional recognition of the dependent relationship between the disciple and Jesus—the pastor must remain in Christ to bear fruit. In considering Jesus’ teaching about the vine and the branches, note three important truths. First, the *identity* of the disciple is established. The disciple is NOT the vine; rather, the vine determines the identity of the branch. Just as a grape vine has grape branches so a “Jesus” vine produces “Jesus branches.” The disciple must conform to the identity of Jesus. Second, there is an *inevitability* of outcomes. On the one hand, everyone experiences a “cutting.” It’s either pruning or perishing (v. 2). For the disciple, one is “pruned” by the Father to bear more fruit. One is shaped at the direction of God. For those who are not disciples, the cutting leads to judgment and perishing. On the other hand, those remaining in Christ, WILL bear fruit (v. 5). Finally, this reality has *impact* for the disciple. Jesus declares that the bearing of fruit by remaining in Him is proof that one is His disciple (v.8). Yet, be reminded that Jesus expresses the call to remain in Him as a command. Such a strong word does suggest there is an intentionality as to how one can abide meaningfully. Intentionally abiding moves us to focus on how we engage with Scripture. Jesus states clearly that we are to remain in Him and His words remain in us (v.7). One must engage Scripture purposefully. What does that mean? 2 Tim 3:16-17 provides helpful insight: “All Scripture is inspired by God<sup>41</sup> and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness so that the man of God may be complete equipped for every good work.” As one engages Scripture, therefore, one should rightly expect to encounter one of the four functions—

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<sup>41</sup> The literal phrasing is “God-breathed” and translated “inspired by God” by the HCSB.

teaching, rebuking, correcting, or training. If not, one is probably just reading and not meditating on the Word. Beyond the meditation on God's Word, the disciple should engage in fervent prayer and should walk in the Spirit. To walk in the Spirit is to surrender one's schedule to God, to confess sin, and to move expectantly in obedience to God.<sup>42</sup> As one is more aware of the command to remain in Jesus so that it directs the actions of the disciple, one's character reflects Christ.

A second practice that can aid the leader in maintaining a strong and vibrant relationship with God is a regular sabbath. Not only should a weekly time away from work in which one has time to delight in God become a regular part of the pastor's schedule, but also regular extended sabbath rests. Get away for a full day or weekend where one can have an extended time of prayer and rest. The leader must take seriously their own spiritual health and growth.

Administrative ability may enhance ministry, but character sustains it. Character is fostered in close connection to the Lord for he is the Vine that determines the nature of the branch.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE CONTROLLING**

The term "controlling" is not understood to suggest a level of dominance; rather controlling is used in the sense of holding something against the norm or standard—the baseline of expectation. The final administrative function, then, involves evaluation and accountability. Controlling refers to the process of assessing whether ministry activities are achieving the intended goals and adjusting where necessary. In management theory in general, controlling involves establishing standards, measuring performance, and correcting deviations from those standards.<sup>43</sup> In considering the task within church administration, one needs to consider the role of evaluation in ministry, a biblical accountability, and adaptation and growth for continued improvement.

### **Evaluation in Ministry**

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<sup>42</sup> The idea of surrendering one's schedule is the act of consciously yielding the events of one's day to God. Asking for wisdom, insight, and direction for one knows that there is no place one will ever be that God is not!

<sup>43</sup> Drucker, pp. 544-548.

Earlier in this chapter some aspects of evaluation have been addressed in connection with various components of the administrative task, i.e. staffing. Here, one needs to look at the role of evaluation of the whole regarding the church's engagement with the ongoing mission of the church. Churches often struggle with evaluation because spiritual outcomes are not always easily measured. Nevertheless, responsible stewardship requires periodic assessment of ministry *effectiveness*.

For the current state of ministry to be evaluated properly, one must have a good understanding of the expected standard. In the task of administrative planning, SMART goals were created so that a clear expectation is given. Evaluation utilizes those goals as a way of measuring effectiveness. Evaluation does not imply negative criticism but rather commitment to improvement. Pastors should develop evaluative questions that can regularly be asked of ministries. For example:

- Are our ministries aligned with our mission?
- Are people growing in discipleship?
- Are resources being stewarded wisely?
- Are our outreach efforts bearing fruit?
- Where is most significant growth occurring?
- Where is help needed?

One aspect connected to evaluation is accountability. When evaluation does not occur, accountability is minimized. The purpose of accountability is not punitive—to punish or demean, but for encouragement. Accountability should create an “iron on iron” environment where each member strengthens one another. For example, in the evangelism courses at Cape Town Baptist Seminary, the students must engage in evangelism. In some courses the instruction is to have at least one gospel conversation with someone the student did not know whom they encountered during their daily activities. The opening minutes of the first class of the week was set aside for reporting and accountability. Students would share experiences. One of the purposes was to identify students who were struggling and seek ways to help. One student reported that he just couldn't witness to someone he didn't know. The solution was not to berate him, but another student who was quite comfortable with such evangelism offered to go along with him on the

coming Saturday. The following week, the first student had completely changed. The experience of partnering with another student and seeing ministry enacted, emboldened and encouraged the student. Without any accountability, that transformation would most likely never have occurred. Accountability can also be created in a church setting. One of the authors was invited to serve as the preacher for three weeks while the pastor was on sabbatical. At the end of the sermon on the first week, he gave the congregation homework which involved three steps. First, each person making a list of five people they knew who didn't know Jesus (and time was given for this to be accomplished in the service). Second, they were to commit to praying for these people daily taking note of whomever God prompted them to pray for throughout the day. Third, they were to contact that person and set up a meeting to have tea and a gospel conversation. Before leaving the service, every member prayed with another member to encourage them in obedience. The following Sunday, before starting the sermon, the preacher asked each person to share with the member next to them about how it went that week praying for and meeting with one of the persons for whom they had been praying. Silence. Then one person spoke up jokingly, "We didn't know you were serious!" So, the same homework was repeated for the coming week. On the third Sunday, the preacher again paused before the sermon and instructed the members to share with one another how it went being obedient. This time conversation was heard around the sanctuary. Afterwards, one member came to the preacher and said that she was so glad he wasn't preaching next week as she didn't want any homework. While she was joking, the reality of the joke hit home. Too often, there is no expectation of ministry for the member of the congregation. There is not a sense of accountability. There is no expectation of being equipped for ministry. This reality must change.

### **Biblical Accountability**

In the Luke 6:46, Jesus challenges His disciples with a haunting question: "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and don't do the things I say?" There is an expectation of obedience for the disciple of Jesus. In the commissioning of the disciples, Jesus states that a component of making disciples is "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded

you” (Matt 28:19). Jesus will compare those who hear His words and acts on them to a wise builder as opposed to a foolish builder who hears His words and does not act on them (Matt 7:24-27). The Holy Spirit throughout Scripture encourages careful self-examination and accountability. Believers are exhorted to examine themselves (2 Cor. 13:5), and Jesus evaluated the spiritual condition of the churches in Revelation 2–3. These passages remind church leaders that evaluation is an important component of spiritual faithfulness.

The pastor, therefore, needs to build into evaluation process a level of accountability. Once again, SMART goals have an accountability dynamic as the objects are measurable with some time component. The pastor, then, can visit these goals with the various ministry partners as a means of evaluating the overall progress of the church.

### **Adaptation for Continuous Improvement**

Healthy churches remain adaptable. Ministries that were effective in previous seasons may require modification in changing cultural contexts. Wise leaders remain attentive to both the unchanging message of the gospel and the changing needs of the community. This reality highlights the relationship between “Form” and “Meaning.” Meaning requires some form so that it can be understood. A basic example is language. Language is required to proclaim the gospel. If someone should move to a new country where a different language is spoken, but continues to use the former language, it is not productive. While the meaning remains unchanged, it is now in a form that doesn’t make sense to the new community; therefore, it is necessary to learn a new “form”, in this case the local language, so that the same meaning can be communicated.

The “form” of ministry will often need to be adapted or updated so that the “meaning” of the gospel can still be understood without hindrance. The adaptation can be timing, location, or method. For example, some methods of gospel presentations assume that the audience shares a basic worldview with Christianity. In such a context, propositional presentations are effective, i.e., the 4 Spiritual Laws. If the basic worldview is not shared, then one must use a more narrative approach that unpacks the biblical worldview in the conversation, i.e., Creation to the Cross, 3 Circles. In ministry, a form that was effective a generation ago may need to be adapted for a newer generation. The

pastor may well need to engage various members representing a multitude of experiences to evaluate properly if the meaning of the ministry is still being communicated. The social media generation communicates and processes information differently than previous generations. A local young adult cell group felt a need to have deeper prayer ministry among its members. The most natural solution was to create an online prayer meeting using WhatsApp. The group meets every Friday at 5:30 am before work. Similarly, multiple “Bible reading” online groups have been created among the young adults as a means of reading Scripture “together.” For previous generations, “together” always implied physical presence, but that is no longer the norm. Ongoing, critical evaluation designed to strengthen the impact of ministry is necessary for sustained growth. The need, then, is for the use of evaluation and adaptation as a means of maintaining direction.

## CONCLUSION

Church administration is far more than institutional management. It is the faithful stewardship of God’s mission within the life of the congregation and a vital dimension of pastoral stewardship of the ministry to which the pastor is called! Through thoughtful planning, intentional staffing, effective organization, visionary leadership, and careful evaluation, pastors guide churches toward greater faithfulness in ministry in the fulfillment of the mission of Christ in their local context.

These administrative functions must always be framed within the biblical model of servant leadership. The pastor is to be more shepherd than CEO serving the body of Christ. Christ himself demonstrated that true leadership is expressed through humility, service, and sacrificial love.

When pastors integrate sound administrative practices with the character of Christ, the church becomes both orderly and spiritually vibrant. Such leadership enables congregations to pursue their mission with clarity, unity, and effectiveness for the glory of God.

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## CHAPTER 6

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# **BIBLICAL PEACEMAKING: A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO MANAGING CONFLICT<sup>1</sup>**

We live in a fallen world that is often filled with conflict.

Friendships enrich our lives, but they sometimes fall apart because of misunderstandings and unmet expectations. Marriages begin with joyful companionship, but all too often they lose their joy and sometimes end in bitter divorce. Children are a delight, but they can break our hearts if they reject us. Churches are places of love and unity, until they divide into bitter factions. Coworkers make us productive, but they can also turn our jobs into nightmares. There is no escaping it: conflict is a part of life.

But amidst all the conflict in this world, there are those who make peace. There are people who resolve differences, restore broken marriages, reconcile estranged children, heal church splits, and settle lawsuits.

These people are called “peacemakers.” Peacemakers are people who breathe grace. They draw continually on the goodness and power of Jesus Christ, and then they bring his love, mercy, forgiveness, strength, and wisdom to the conflicts of daily life. God delights to bring about shalom (peace) through peacemakers and use them to dissipate anger, improve understanding, promote justice, and encourage forgiveness and reconciliation.

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on class notes on Biblical Peace Making prepared by Prof Godfrey Harold at Cape Town Baptist Seminary and is an adaptation of the books: Ken Sande, *Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Grand Rapids: : Baker Books, 2004) and A. Poirier *The Peace Making Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Managing Conflict in your Home* (Grand Rapids : Baker Books book, 2006).

## The Biblical Concept of Shalom

To understand peacemaking, one must first understand the Hebrew concept of Shalom. While often translated simply as “peace,” its semantic range in the Old Testament is far broader, encompassing wholeness, completeness, prosperity, and harmony. Wolterstorff<sup>2</sup> defines Shalom as “the state of the world as God intended it,” a flourishing that is inherently relational and ethical.

### *The Etymology of Wholeness*

The root *sh-l-m* conveys the idea of a debt being paid, a wall being mended, or a broken vessel being made whole. In the context of the community (the *qahal*), Shalom was the state where every member of the covenant community flourished in relationship with God and neighbor. It is a “thick” peace, rooted in justice (*mishpat*) and righteousness (*tsedaqah*).<sup>3</sup>

Unlike the *Pax Romana* (the Peace of Rome), which was a peace enforced by the sword (the absence of visible war), Shalom is a peace invited by the Spirit and the presence of righteousness. It is not merely the cessation of hostilities but the restoration of the “very fabric of the community.”<sup>4</sup> Consequently, biblical peacemaking is not a passive endeavor; it is an active, costly pursuit of the “wholeness” of the other.

### *The Four-Fold Alienation of the Fall*

The Fall (Genesis 3) was the ultimate disruption of Shalom, and describes sin as “the spoiling of shalom,” a parasitic intrusion into the good creation. The Fall introduced a cascading series of alienations that define the human condition:

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<sup>2</sup> N. Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1983), p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> G. Harold, “Engaging God’s Mission through Justice and Compassion: An Evangelical Discourse” *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology*, Vol. 23., 2014, pp. 166-174. See also Walter Bruggeman’s understanding of Shalom in *Living Toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom* (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1976), pp. 15-16.

<sup>4</sup> See G. Van de Walt’s article, “Peace is not the absence of war but the presence of a relationship founded by God – שלום (shalom) in Isaiah and Micah” in *Die Skriflig* 55(2).

- **Theological Alienation** (*Humanity from God*): Adam and Eve's first response to sin was to hide. This "fear of the holy" represents the vertical rupture that precedes all horizontal conflict. Without peace with God, man lives in a state of existential anxiety, attempting to secure his own worth through competition.
- **Psychological Alienation** (*Humanity from Self*): Shame and nakedness represent the internal fragmentation of the soul. Humanity no longer sees themselves as God sees them; they are plagued by self-reproach or self-exaltation, leading to the "fragile ego" that reacts violently to perceived slights.
- **Social Alienation** (*Humanity from Humanity*): The "blame game" in the garden (Genesis 3:12) marks the birth of interpersonal conflict. Adam's defense of himself required the condemnation of his wife. This established the "Us vs. Them" paradigm that fuels all human disputes.
- **Ecological Alienation** (*Humanity from Nature*): The curse upon the ground signifies that even the physical world is in a state of "groaning" (Romans 8:22), making human labor and survival a source of friction and scarcity.

Biblical peacemaking, therefore, is the pursuit of restored Shalom. It is a "redemptive" work that seeks to reverse the effects of the Fall by applying the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Corinthians 5:18).

#### *The Gospel as the Catalyst for Reconciliation*

At the heart of biblical peacemaking is the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Secular conflict resolution often relies on "Interest-Based Bargaining," which seeks a pragmatic compromise. While useful for commercial disputes, it lacks the power to heal a wounded heart or address the root causes of malice.

#### *The Doctrine of Atonement: Vertical to Horizontal*

The cross of Christ is the supreme act of peacemaking. In Colossians 1:20, Paul writes that God chose to "reconcile to himself all things...

making peace by the blood of his cross.” This vertical reconciliation provides the moral capital for horizontal reconciliation.

In the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21–35), Jesus illustrates that the believer’s motivation to forgive others is rooted in the “astronomical debt” that God has already canceled for them. The cross, therefore, is not just a model for peacemaking but the *source* of the power to do it. To refuse to make peace with a brother is to deny functionally the sufficiency of the cross for one’s own sins. The Gospel enables one to move from “rights-based” thinking to “grace-based” living!

### *Imputation and the Death of Self-Justification*

The critical understanding in biblical peacemaking is the doctrine of imputation. Because Christ’s righteousness is imputed to the believer (2 Corinthians 5:21), their identity is no longer tied to being “right” or “defending their reputation.”

In most conflicts, the reason for escalation is self-justification. One fights because they feel their worth is being attacked; however, if the believer is already “justified” by God through faith, they have nothing left to prove to their opponent. This security allows a peacemaker to be vulnerable, to admit fault (even if they are only partially responsible), and to absorb an insult without the need for immediate retaliation.

## **Definition of Conflict**

Conflict is an inevitable part of life, especially in the context of the church. Jesus himself taught that peacemakers are blessed (Matt. 5:9), and the apostle Paul modeled peacemaking in his ministry (Acts 15). Yet the reality is that conflict can be a source of division or an opportunity for growth. Conflict can be broadly defined as a “difference of opinion or purpose that frustrates someone’s goals or desires,”<sup>5</sup> in simpler terms, conflict arises when two or more people have opposing needs, interests, or perspectives. It can manifest in many forms—from a heated argument in a small group to a bitter disagreement between church leaders. Crucially, one must recognize that conflict is not inherently bad; it can be healthy and even necessary in relationships. When conflict is mismanaged, however, it can escalate into hurt, anger, and

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<sup>5</sup> Sande, p. 29.

broken relationships. The key is to recognize conflict as a natural human occurrence and respond to it in ways that honor God and preserve relationships.

With a broad definition of conflict in mind, this chapter will explore biblical principles of peacemaking, how conflict can be used for God's glory, the "slippery slope" of conflict, and the practices of biblical reconciliation and forgiveness. One will also examine the **PAUSE principle** for negotiation and the **GOSPEL principle** for mediation, providing practical guidance for pastors on how to handle interpersonal conflict with a biblical mindset.

## FOUR "Gs" OF PEACEMAKING

### G1: Conflict as an Opportunity to GLORIFY God<sup>6</sup>

One of the remarkable truths of the Christian faith is that God can use even conflict for his glory. In fact, the Bible teaches that conflict provides opportunities to glorify God, serve others, and grow in Christ-likeness. When believers approach conflict with a God-centered perspective, they can turn a potentially destructive situation into a chance to display the gospel. Consider how different responses to conflict can lead to different outcomes.

For example, in his book *The Peacemaker*, Ken Sande<sup>7</sup> shares a story of two brothers who were in conflict over their mother's estate. The brothers were at odds, and the conflict threatened to tear the family apart. Instead of focusing on their own rights or grievances, the family sought to resolve the conflict in a way that honored God. They invited a pastor to mediate, and together they pursued reconciliation. In the end, they not only settled the legal issues but also deepened their relationships. The conflict became an opportunity to show grace, forgive past wrongs, and glorify God by loving one another. The pastor in this scenario, acting as a peacemaker, helped the family see that the highest goal was not just to divide the estate, but to reflect the love of Christ.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-74.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-25.

As one brother later said, “Maybe there is a God after all, because there’s no way Dad would have done that” (referring to the reconciliation they achieved). This story underscores the biblical principle that when Christians approach conflict in a God-honoring manner, it can lead to greater unity and a testimony of God’s power at work.

Another way to view conflict as an opportunity is through the lens of growth. James 1:2-4 reminds us that we can consider it pure joy when we face trials of many kinds, because they produce perseverance, character, and hope. Conflict, like any trial, can be a catalyst for spiritual growth if we respond in faith. It can expose our sin, teach us humility, and refine our relationships. The apostle Paul’s experience with Barnabas (Acts 15) is a prime example: their sharp disagreement became a turning point that led to renewed ministry partnerships. By working through their conflict in a biblical way, they emerged stronger and more effective. The bottom line is that when conflict is embraced as a chance to glorify God and serve others, it can result in deeper love, greater understanding, and a more powerful witness to the world. As Ken Sande puts it, “Conflict is not necessarily bad or destructive. Even when conflict is caused by sin and causes a great deal of stress, God can use it for good.”<sup>8</sup>

### *Conflict as Stewardship*

Understanding that conflict ought to become an opportunity to bring glory to God requires a shift in how one views conflict. Further, one needs to view their approach to conflict as stewardship of the opportunity to glorify God. In truth, one should recognize a three-fold opportunity amid conflict.

## **The Opportunity to Glorify God**

To glorify God in conflict means to make His character visible in a dark situation. When a person responds to an attack with gentleness (Proverbs 15:1) or chooses to confess a hidden fault, they “put God’s grace on display.” This shifts the focus from “How do I win?” to “How can I show how great God is in this?” (1 Corinthians 10:31). This perspective transforms the conflict from a burden into an act of worship.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 30.

## **The Opportunity to Serve Others**

In the heat of conflict, the natural human tendency is to see the opponent as an enemy to be defeated. Biblical peacemaking re-humanizes the opponent, seeing them as a person made in the *Imago Dei* (the Image of God) who is likely struggling with their own fears and sins. Serving an opponent might involve “heaping burning coals” of kindness (Romans 12:20) or applying the “PAUSE” principle—actively listening to their concerns and interests before asserting one’s own (Philippians 2:4) as discussed later in this chapter.

## **The Opportunity to Grow in Christlikeness**

Conflict is a “sanctification laboratory.” It reveals the “dross” in our character—impatience, pride, bitterness, and the desire for control. James 1:2–4 encourages believers to “count it all joy” when they meet trials, because the testing of faith produces steadfastness. This realization aligns with the concept of “Restorative Justice,” where the goal is not merely a legal settlement but the moral and spiritual transformation of the participants.

### *The Slippery Slope of Conflict*

Conflict often begins with minor differences, but if not addressed, it can quickly escalate. Ken Sande<sup>9</sup> describes this dynamic as the “slippery slope of conflict,” a visual tool that helps us understand how conflict can spiral out of control.

In biblical peacemaking, one understands that conflict is rarely about the “thing” being argued over (the “surface issue”); rather, it is about the “thrones” of our hearts. An idol is anything that “rules” us. The progression from a godly desire to a demonic demand follows a predictable, escalating path.<sup>10</sup>

## **The Stage of Desire: “I Want”**

Every conflict begins with a desire. It is crucial to recognize that idols are rarely “bad things” like murder or theft; more often, they are “good

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 22.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 17-22.

things” that have been elevated to “ultimate things.” St. Augustine<sup>11</sup> referred to this as “disordered love”—loving a lesser good more than the Greatest Good (God).

- *Legitimate Desires*: Examples include the desire for a spouse’s affection, a child’s obedience, a fair wage, or a peaceful home. These are God-given and biblical.
- *The Subtle Shift*: The danger arises when a desire is no longer a “request” made to God, but a “requirement” for one’s well-being. At this stage, the desire is still quiet, but it is beginning to take root as the primary lens through which we view our circumstances.

### **The Stage of Demand: “I Must”**

The transition from “I want” to “I must” is the pivot point where a desire becomes an idol. In this stage, the desire is “moralized” or “essentialized.” It becomes a “functional savior”—“something I believe I need to be happy, secure, or significant.”

- *The Language of “Should”*: This stage is characterized by “should-y” thinking: “My husband or wife should listen to me,” or “My boss should recognize my hard work.”
- *The Loss of Freedom*: Once a desire becomes a demand, we lose the spiritual freedom to be content without it (Philippians 4:11-13). We become “slaves” to that desire. If the desire is for “control,” any unexpected change in plans feels like a personal assault rather than a mere inconvenience.

### **The Stage of Judgment: “You Ought”**

When an idol-driven demand is not met, the heart naturally moves to judgment. Because one has made their desire “ultimate,” the person

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<sup>11</sup> St Augustine, 1873. *On Christian Doctrine*, Translated by J.F. Shaw (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1873), I. 27-29. St. Augustine insists that anything that replaces God is disordered love.

who stands in the way of that desire is no longer just a “sinner” or a “flawed human”; they become an enemy of their happiness.

- *Dehumanization*: In this phase, we stop seeing the other person in the Imago Dei. We begin to “label” them: “He is a narcissist,” “She is a control freak,” or “They are incompetent.”
- *Self-Righteousness*: Judgment is fueled by the belief that my demand is righteous and your failure to meet it is a moral evil. We become the “judge, jury, and executioner” in our own courtroom, blinded to our own “log” (Matthew 7:3) because we are so focused on the other person’s “speck” of failure to satisfy us.

### **The Stage of Punishment: “You Will Pay”**

The final stage of the progression is the execution of the judgment. Since the other person has “sinned” against our idol, we feel justified in punishing them. Punishment takes two primary forms, mirroring the “Slippery Slope” of conflict:

- **Active Punishment** (*Peace-Breaking*): This includes overt anger, shouting, physical violence, litigation, or “character assassination” (gossip). The goal is to force the other person to submit to our demand through fear or pain.
- **Passive Punishment** (*Peace-Faking*): This is often more subtle but equally destructive. It includes the “silent treatment,” emotional withdrawal, withholding affection, or “malicious compliance.” We punish by removing the “good” from the relationship, hoping the other person will feel the “void” and eventually give us what we want.

### **The Theological Diagnostic: “Idol-Surgery”**

To break this cycle, the peacemaker must perform what Sande (2004) calls “Idol-Surgery.” This involves asking diagnostic questions during the heat of a conflict:

- “What am I afraid of losing right now?” (Identifies the idol of *Security*).
- “What do I think I need to be happy in this moment? (Identifies the idol of *Comfort/Pleasure*)
- “Why am I so angry that I am willing to sin to get my way?” (Identifies the “*Must*” behind the “*Want*”).

By identifying the progression at the “Demand” stage, the believer can apply the Gospel: repenting of the disordered love, trusting in Christ’s sufficiency, and returning to a state where they can “want” the thing without “needing” it. This process de-escalates the heart, making “Gentle Restoration.” The diagram below illustrates the typical progression from a minor disagreement to destructive outcomes if left unmanaged:

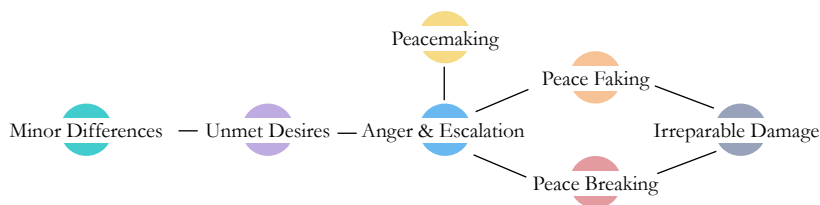


Figure 1: “The Slippery Slope of Conflict”

Here’s how the slippery slope progresses:

- **Minor Differences:** Conflict often starts with a small disagreement or misunderstanding. Perhaps someone’s words or actions unintentionally offend another, or there’s a difference of opinion on a minor issue. At this stage, the conflict is manageable if addressed early.
- **Unmet Desires and Hurt Feelings:** As differences persist, underlying desires and emotions come into play. When our desires are not met or our feelings are hurt, we may become frustrated or angry. This is a critical point: the conflict can begin to feel personal. If we do not respond gently, the situation can escalate.

- **Anger and Escalation:** When anger sets in, we may react in unwise ways. Some people withdraw or avoid the conflict (peace-faking), while others become argumentative or aggressive (peace-breaking). Escaping the conflict (e.g. ignoring it or avoiding the person) might seem easier in the moment, but it only delays a proper resolution and can cause resentment to fester. Attacking the conflict (e.g. lashing out, blaming, or refusing to compromise) tends to make things worse and can damage relationships. As Sande<sup>12</sup> notes, Escape responses only postpone a proper solution to a problem, and attack responses usually damage relationships and make conflicts worse. If left unchecked, the conflict can slide further down the slope.
- **Irreparable Damage:** If neither side takes responsibility or seeks reconciliation, the conflict can reach a point of no return. Hurt feelings deepen, trust is broken, and relationships may be permanently damaged. In extreme cases, what began as a minor difference can result in a serious rift—even divorce, separation from the church, or broken friendships. The “slippery slope” metaphor is apt: it’s easy to slip into bad habits of responding to conflict, and once you’re on that slope, it’s hard to get back up without help.

The key lesson of the slippery slope is that one must be proactive in managing conflict. By addressing issues early and choosing healthy responses, we can stay on the “peacemaking” path instead of sliding into destructive patterns. Peacemakers don’t wait for conflict to explode; they step in early with grace and wisdom. This position might mean intervening in a small disagreement before it becomes a major feud, or it might mean helping a couple or a small group talk through their differences before things escalate. The goal is to recognize the early warning signs of conflict and address them promptly, before the situation spirals out of control. By doing so, pastors and church leaders can help their congregations navigate conflict in a way that preserves relationships and honors God. One action to prevent the escalation of conflict is identify one’s contribution to the conflict.

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<sup>12</sup> Sande, p. 25.

## G2: GET the Log Out of Your Own Eye<sup>13</sup>

One of the most challenging principles of peacemaking is set forth in Matthew 7:5, where Jesus says, “You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.” There are generally two kinds of “logs” one needs to look for when dealing with conflict. First, one needs to ask whether they have had a critical, negative, or overly sensitive attitude that has led to unnecessary conflict. One of the best ways to do this step is to spend some time meditating on Philippians 4:2-9, which describes the kind of attitude Christians should have even when they are involved in a conflict. The second kind of log one must deal with is actual sinful words and actions. Because one is often blind to their own sins, they may need an honest friend or adviser who will help them to take an objective look at themselves and face up to their contribution to a conflict. When they identify ways that they have wronged another person, it is important to admit wrongs honestly and thoroughly. A shallow apology often acts as a “speed bump” rather than a “bridge” to reconciliation. To “get the log out,” a believer must engage in a comprehensive process that addresses the root of the offense and the pain of the victim. One way to do this is to use:

*The “Seven As of Confession:”<sup>14</sup> The Anatomy of Repentance*

### 1: Address Everyone Involved

Confession must be as broad as the offense. If a sin was committed against one person, it must be confessed to that person. If it was committed in the presence of others or affected a group (e.g., gossip or an outburst in a meeting), the confession must extend to the entire circle of impact. Confession must be both “Vertical” and “Horizontal”: Every sin is primarily an offense against God (Psalm 51:4). Therefore, every confession must begin with the “Vertical” (repentance before God) before moving to the “Horizontal” (reconciliation with man).

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp 75-138.

<sup>14</sup> Sande, pp. 126-137.

## **2: Avoid “If,” “But,” and “Maybe”**

This step is the most critical “A” for maintaining sincerity. The inclusion of “if” or “but” effectively cancels the confession and shifts the blame back onto the other person. The inclusion of such a qualifier is a “Non-Apology”: “I’m sorry if you were offended” is not a confession of sin; it is a critique of the other person’s sensitivity. A goal of the process is to eliminate excuses: “I’m sorry I yelled, *but* you were being unreasonable” is an attempt at self-justification. A biblical confession takes 100% responsibility for one’s own actions, regardless of the other person’s behavior. As Sande<sup>15</sup> concludes that even if you are only 2% responsible, you are 100% responsible for your 2%.

## **3: Admit Specifically**

Generalities like “I haven’t been a very good friend” are easy to say but hard to reconcile. Specificity demonstrates that you have truly examined your heart and understand the nature of your sin. One is taking the time to “Name the Sin”: Use biblical language where appropriate (e.g., “I was prideful,” “I spoke harshly,” “I was deceptive”). Use the “Log” Diagnostic: Instead of saying “I’m sorry for the conflict,” say “I’m sorry that I interrupted you and ignored your ideas during our discussion yesterday.”

## **4: Acknowledge the Hurt**

Repentance requires empathy. You must show the other person that you understand the “weight” of the pain you caused. This understanding “Validates the Impact”: “I realize that my words made you feel undervalued and embarrassed in front of the team.” By acknowledging the hurt, one signals that they are no longer prioritizing their own “reputation” but are instead prioritizing the other person’s “restoration.”

## **5: Accept the Consequences**

Sin often leaves a “debt” or damage in its wake. A sincere confessor is willing to “make it right” through restitution. Is there an aspect of “Restorative Justice” to implement? This step might involve financial

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 127-128.

repayment, a public retraction of a false statement, or a commitment to “cleanup” the mess caused by a neglected duty. One must also “Accept Relational Consequences”. Sometimes the consequence is a temporary loss of trust. Accepting this reality with humility—rather than demanding immediate trust—is a sign of genuine repentance.

## **6: Alter Behavior**

The Greek word *metanoia* means “a change of mind” that leads to a change of direction. A confession without a plan for change is merely “cheap grace.”<sup>16</sup> One should demonstrate “Fruit in Keeping with Repentance” (Matthew 3:8). This involves identifying the “heart-idol” that led to the sin and putting in place spiritual disciplines or accountability to prevent its recurrence. For example, “I am seeking counsel to help me manage my anger so that this doesn't happen again.”

## **7: Ask for Forgiveness**

The final step is to relinquish control of the outcome. By asking, “Will you forgive me?” one puts the ball in the other person’s court. This step does require one to “Wait for the Response”. This pause is a humble admission that one have no “right” to be forgiven; it is a request for grace. It allows the other person the space to process their own heart and grants them the dignity of offering a voluntary gift of forgiveness.

### *The Theological Safety of Confession*

Why is this process so difficult? Because our “Natural Man” fears that admitting specific, unexcused sin will lead to our destruction. The *Doctrine of Imputation* discussed provides the theological “safety net.”

Because the believer is already fully accepted and “clothed” in the righteousness of Christ, they no longer need to hide their “nakedness” (Genesis 3). They can afford to be the “chief of sinners” in a conflict because they are already a “child of God” in the Gospel. This security turns the Seven As from a “humiliating chore” into a “liberating exercise” of truth and grace.

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<sup>16</sup> D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: McMillian Publications, 1979), p. 48.

The most important aspect of getting the log out of one's own eye is to go beyond the confession of wrong behavior and face up to the root cause of that behavior. The Bible teaches that conflict comes from the desires that battle in the heart (James 4:1-3; Matt. 15:18-19). Some of these desires are obviously sinful, such as wanting to conceal the truth, bend others to one's will, or have revenge. In many situations, however, conflict is fueled by good desires that one has elevated to sinful demands, such as a craving to be understood, loved, respected, or vindicated. Any time one becomes excessively preoccupied with something, even a good thing, and seek to find happiness, security, or fulfillment in it rather than in God, one is guilty of idolatry. Idolatry inevitably leads to conflict with God ("You shall have no other gods before me"). It also causes conflict with other people. As James writes, when one wants something but don't get it, they kill and covet, quarrel and fight (James 4:1-4). There are three basic steps one can take to overcome the idolatry that fuels conflict. First, one should ask God to help them see where they have been guilty of wrong worship, that is, where they are focusing their love, attention, and energy on something other than God. Second, one should specifically identify and renounce each of the desires contributing to the conflict. Third, one should deliberately pursue right worship, that is, to fix their heart and mind on God and to seek joy, fulfillment, and satisfaction in him alone. As God guides and empowers these efforts, one can find freedom from the idols that fuel conflict and be motivated to make choices that will please and honor Christ. This change in heart will usually speed up a resolution to a present problem, and at the same time improve one's ability to avoid similar conflicts in the future.

### **G3: Gently Restore (The External Focus)<sup>17</sup>**

The third "G" represents the "redemptive confrontation" phase of peacemaking. After a believer has rigorously examined their own heart, they are finally prepared to fulfill the mandate of Matthew 7:5: "...then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." It is a common misconception in Christian circles that "judging not" (Matthew 7:1) means "ignoring sin." Jesus, however, is not command-

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<sup>17</sup> Sande, pp. 139-200.

ing moral indifference; He is commanding a moral sequence. We are commanded to help our brother with his “speck,” but we must do so with a vision cleared by our own repentance.

Restoration is an act of sacrificial love. It requires the peacemaker to move toward the “fire” of the conflict rather than fleeing (the Escape ) or fanning the flames (the Attack ). As Sande<sup>18</sup> posits, the goal of G3 is not to “fix” the other person, but to “win” them (Matthew 18:15). This step requires a sophisticated blend of theological conviction and interpersonal gentleness.

#### *The Theological Mandate: Katartizete (Restoration)*

The cornerstone of biblical restoration is found in Galatians 6:1: “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.” The Greek verb translated as “restore” is *katartizete* (from *katartizo*), a word rich with technical and metaphorical meaning in the first-century world.

### **The Medical Metaphor: Setting a Broken Bone**

In classical Greek medical literature, *katartizo* was the technical term for setting a fractured or dislocated bone. This metaphor provides profound insight into the “spirit of gentleness”:

- *Precision and Pain:* Setting a bone is inherently painful for the patient. The surgeon’s motive, however, is not to inflict pain but to ensure future mobility. A bone that is not set properly will heal “crooked,” leading to a lifetime of dysfunction. Similarly, undressed sin “dislocates” a person from God and the community.
- *The Gentle Touch:* A surgeon who is rough or angry will cause unnecessary trauma. Restoration requires a “steady but soft” hand—firm enough to speak the truth about the sin, but gentle enough to preserve the dignity of the sinner.

### **The Functional Metaphor: Mending a Torn Net**

In the Gospels, *katartizo* is used to describe James and John “mending” their fishing nets (Matthew 4:21):

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 185-200.

- *Restoring Purpose*: A net with a hole is useless for its primary purpose; the fish simply swim through the gap. When a believer falls into sin or a relationship is torn by conflict, the “functional capacity” of that relationship to serve God is compromised.
- *Interweaving*: Restoration is the meticulous process of re-weaving the broken threads of trust and truth. It is “structural repair” that allows the relationship to once again hold the “weight” of shared life and ministry.

### **The Spiritual Qualification: “You Who Are Spiritual”**

Paul limits this mandate to those who are “spiritual” (*pneumatikoi*). This term does not refer to a super-elite class of Christians, but to those who are currently “walking by the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16). A “spiritual” person is one whose own “log” has been removed and who is manifesting the “fruit of the Spirit”—the first of which is love and the last of which is self-control. Without self-control, the peacemaker will react to the opponent’s defensiveness with their own anger, destroying the possibility of *katartizo*.

#### *Speaking the Truth in Love (Ephesians 4:15)*

If *katartizete* is the goal, then “speaking the truth in love” is the method. In Ephesians 4:15, the Apostle Paul uses a unique Greek construction, *aletheuontes en agape*—literally, “truthing in love.” This phrase is not a suggestion but a requirement for the “growth of the body.”

### **The Tension of the “Narrow Ridge”**

Peacemakers must walk the narrow ridge between two destructive valleys:

- *Truth without Love (Brutality)*: This approach is often the “Attack” response in a religious mask. It uses the Bible as a hammer to crush the opponent. While the facts might be “true,” the spirit is legalistic and condemnatory. Truth becomes hard if it is not softened by love, and love becomes soft if it is not strengthened by truth.
- *Love without Truth (Sentimentality)*: This approach is the “Escape” response in a mask of “niceness.” It avoids the hard conversa-

tion to maintain a “pseudo-peace.” A love that refuses to warn a brother of the destructive nature of his sin, however, is not biblical *agape*; it is a form of “relational cowardice.”

### **The Logic of “Truthing in Love” (Peace Making)**

“Truthing in love” means that the content of the message is biblically accurate (Truth), while the intent and delivery of the message are motivated by the other person's highest good (Love):

- *Intent*: The goal is the other person's “upbuilding” (Ephesians 4:29). Before speaking, the peacemaker should ask: “Am I saying this to get this off my chest, or to help them grow?”
- *Delivery*: This involves the “Soft Answer” (Proverbs 15:1). It uses “I-statements” to describe the impact of the sin (“I felt hurt when...”) rather than “You-statements” to attack the character of the person (“You are always so selfish...”).

### **The Timing of Truth**

Part of “loving” someone is choosing the right time to speak the “truth.” Proverbs 25:11 says, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.” Restoration often fails because the peacemaker speaks the right truth at the wrong time (e.g., when emotions are too high or in front of others). “Truthing in love” respects the other person's emotional capacity and the privacy required for a Matthew 18:15 “one-on-one” encounter.

#### *The Redemptive Power of G3*

When a believer approaches an opponent with a “cleared eye” (G2) and a “mending heart” (G3), they are acting as a “mini-incarnation” of Jesus Christ. Christ is the ultimate *Katartizetes*—the One who came not to condemn the world, but that the world might be “mended” through Him. By balancing the weight of truth with the warmth of love, the peacemaker creates the “relational safety” necessary for the offender to repent. This positioning sets the stage for the final G: Go and Be Reconciled, where the debt of sin is finally canceled and Shalom is restored.

## **G4: Go and Be Reconciled (The Relational Finality)<sup>19</sup>**

The fourth “G” represents the goal of biblical peacemaking: the restoration of Shalom. Jesus makes this an urgent priority in Matthew 5:23–24: “If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”

Theologically, reconciliation is the “horizontal” application of the “vertical” peace the Christian has with God. Reconciliation requires a “will to embrace”—a conscious decision to open one’s arms to the “other,” even the one who has caused us pain. This process is governed by two critical components: the nature of forgiveness and the promises of restoration.

### *Forgiveness as a Decision, Not a Feeling*

In the contemporary therapeutic culture, forgiveness is often defined as an “emotional release”—a way for the victim to “let go of anger” so they can “move on.” While emotional healing is a byproduct of forgiveness, the biblical definition is far more robust and objective. In the New Testament, two primary Greek words are used for forgiveness: *aphiemi* (to send away, release, or cancel a debt) and *charizomai* (to give grace or forgive freely).

## **The Judicial Release of Debt**

Drawing from the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21–35), biblical forgiveness is a judicial act. It is the decision to “cancel the debt” that the offender owes you. When someone sins against another, they “owe” them—they owe an apology, restitution, or the right to see them suffer. Forgiveness is the act of taking that “IOU” and tearing it up. Forgiveness is never “free.” Someone always pays. If someone breaks a lamp, either they pay for it, or they are “forgiven” and you or someone else pays for it. In the Gospel, God forgave us by absorbing the cost of our sin on the Cross. In G4, the

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<sup>19</sup> Sande, pp. 201–258.

peacemaker chooses to “absorb the pain” of the offense rather than “passing it back” through retaliation.

## **The Covenantal Promise**

Ken Sande<sup>20</sup> emphasizes that forgiveness is a covenantal promise, not an emotional state. One does not wait until they “feel” like forgiving; they obey the command to forgive (Colossians 3:13) and trust that their feelings will eventually align with our decision. Consider this action in terms of “The Imitation of God (*Imitatio Dei*)”: The Christian is commanded to forgive “as the Lord has forgiven them.” How does God forgive? In Jeremiah 31:34, God says, “I will remember their sin no more.” This declaration does not mean God has “divine amnesia.” It means He promises not to mention or use one’s sins against them ever again. Forgiveness, therefore, is a commitment to a new way of relating to the offender.

### *The Four Promises of Forgiveness*

To move forgiveness from a vague theological concept to a relational reality, Sande<sup>21</sup> codified the “Four Promises of Forgiveness.” These promises serve as the “terms of the treaty” for the restored relationship.

#### **Promise 1: “I will not dwell on this incident.”**

This declaration is a promise to oneself and to God regarding the internal thought life. It is a step of “Mortifying Resentment”: Forgiveness is the “active forgetting” of an offense. While the memory may remain, the “sting” is removed because the believer refuses to “ruminate” on the wrong. By refusing to dwell on the incident, the peacemaker prevents bitterness from taking root (Hebrews 12:15).

#### **Promise 2: “I will not bring this incident up and use it against you.”**

This declaration is a promise to the offender regarding direct communication. It promises the “End of Weaponization”. In many “peace-faking” relationships, old sins are stored in a “relational arsenal” to be brought up during future arguments to gain leverage. G4 requires the

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<sup>20</sup> Sande, pp 202-213.

<sup>21</sup> Sande, p 202-213.

total decommissioning of this arsenal. Once a matter is forgiven, it is “buried.” Bringing it up again to shame or manipulate the other person is a breach of the covenant of forgiveness.

### **Promise 3: “I will not talk to others about this incident.”**

This promise positions the believer to protect the offender’s reputation and the community. It is the declaration of the “Death of Gossip”. Forgiveness kills gossip. In a conflict, there is a strong temptation to “share the struggle” with others to gain sympathy or to “warn” them about the offender. Once reconciliation is reached, however, the peacemaker commits to silence. Proverb 17:9 says, “Whoever covers an offense seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.”

### **Promise 4: “I will not let this incident stand between us or hinder our personal relationship.”**

This promise expresses a desire future fellowship. This step has two important dynamics:

- *Restoring the Bridge*: This is the most difficult promise because it involves the restoration of trust. While forgiveness is unconditional (we must forgive even if they don't ask), reconciliation is conditional on the other person’s repentance and the rebuilding of trust.
- *The Goal of Intimacy*: The fourth promise means “I am not going to withdraw from you or give you the 'silent treatment' because of this.” It is a commitment to move toward the person in love, seeking to restore the level of intimacy that existed before the conflict, or even a deeper level of trust born through the resolution process.

#### *Forgiveness vs. Reconciliation*

It is critical to distinguish between forgiveness and reconciliation for a healthy G4:

- **Forgiveness (Unilateral)**: This is a work of the heart before God. You can (and must) forgive an unrepentant person to avoid bitterness (Mark 11:25). It is the release of the “right to punish.”

- Reconciliation (Bilateral): This is the restoration of the relationship. It requires two people. If the offender is still dangerous or unrepentant, forgiveness is granted, but boundaries may remain until trust is rebuilt. As Volf notes, “Forgiveness is the boundary between exclusion and embrace.”<sup>22</sup> We forgive so that the possibility of embrace remains open.

#### *The Gospel Finality of G4*

G4 is the moment where the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Corinthians 5:18) is fully realized in human time and space. By making the Four Promises, the believer acts as a living witness to the Gospel. They demonstrate that the Cross of Christ is powerful enough to heal even the deepest relational wounds. When one acts to “Go and Be Reconciled,” they are not just solving a problem; they are participating in the “New Creation” where Shalom is the final word.

## **BIBLICAL RECONCILIATION AND FORGIVENESS**

Reconciliation and forgiveness are at the heart of biblical peacemaking. The Bible commands believers to pursue peace and to forgive one another as God has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13). True reconciliation is more than just an end to a conflict; it’s the restoration of a broken relationship through mutual forgiveness and restoration. In the New Testament, reconciliation is often portrayed as God’s work through Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-19) and as something Christians are called to extend to others (Matt. 5:23-24). Forgiveness, on the other hand, is the deliberate choice to release the right to retaliate or hold a grudge against someone who has wronged the Christian. It is a gift received from God that we are called to give to others.

When conflict occurs, reconciliation typically involves two key steps: confession and forgiveness. If one has wronged another, they must be willing to confess their sin to them (James 5:16) and seek their forgiveness. This action is not easy, but it is necessary for healing. The

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<sup>22</sup> Volf, p. 125.

pastor can play a crucial role here by guiding the offender through a sincere confession in which the offender takes full responsibility for their actions and shows genuine remorse.<sup>23</sup> Forgiveness, in turn, involves the offended party releasing the offense. It is a decision made by the forgiver to let go of anger and not hold the offense against the offender. As the apostle Paul writes, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Eph. 4:32). Forgiveness is not always easy, especially when the hurt is deep, but it is essential for reconciliation. It allows the relationship to be restored and for God’s peace to reign.

Biblical reconciliation also involves restoring a right relationship with God. Before seeking reconciliation with others, we must first be reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-19). This foundation of reconciliation with God empowers us to extend forgiveness to others in the same way God has forgiven us. When one approaches conflict with a heart that has been reconciled to God with pure motives, they desire to please God and restore relationships, not to get even or to be right. By following this path, pastors can help those in conflict to not only resolve their differences but also to experience the healing power of God’s grace.

It’s important to recognize that reconciliation is a process, not an instant fix. Some conflicts may take time to heal, and the pastor may need to facilitate multiple conversations or meetings. The end goal, however, is worth it: a restored relationship that is stronger and more Christ-like. In the book *The Peacemaker*, Sande<sup>24</sup> emphasizes that reconciliation goes beyond the absence of conflict; it means actively pursuing peace and reconciliation with others, as Jesus commanded (Matt. 5:23-24). When conflicts are resolved through biblical reconciliation and forgiveness, it not only heals the immediate parties but also glorifies God and sets an example for others in the church. As Paul reminds us, “Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony” (Col. 3:14). By modeling reconciliation and forgiveness, pastors demonstrate the love of Christ and invite others to do the same.

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<sup>23</sup> Consider the “Seven A’s of Confession” discussed above as a guide for understanding sincere confession.

<sup>24</sup> Sande, pp. 30-31.

## The PAUSE Principle for Negotiation: Managing Interpersonal Conflict<sup>25</sup>

Conflict often involves negotiation—whether it’s resolving a disagreement between church members, mediating a dispute over church property, or settling issues within a small group. The PAUSE principle provides a structured, biblical approach to negotiation that can help pastors and peacemakers navigate these conversations effectively. PAUSE is an acronym that stands for five key steps: Prepare, Affirm, Understand, Search, and Evaluate. By following this process, negotiators can focus on finding mutually beneficial solutions rather than getting caught up in the heat of the moment. Here’s a breakdown of the PAUSE principle:

- **P – Prepare:** Preparation is crucial in any negotiation. This step involves gathering information, clarifying the issues, and planning your approach. As Ken Sande advises, “When you need to negotiate, PAUSE. P for prepare.” Preparation might include praying for wisdom, researching relevant facts or Scripture, consulting with others for advice, and identifying your own interests as well as the interests of the other party. Preparation helps ensure that you enter the negotiation with a clear mind and a well-thought-out strategy. It also helps manage emotions by giving you a sense of control and direction.
- **A – Affirm:** The second step is to affirm relationships. Before diving into the details of the conflict, it’s important to acknowledge and respect the other person. This means creating a safe, respectful environment where both sides feel heard and valued. Affirming relationships involves showing concern for the other person’s well-being and interests, even as you address the conflict. As Sande writes, “In negotiations, we must affirm relationships—show concern and respect. Communicate in a courteous manner. Spend time on personal issues. Exercise authority with restraint. Submit to authority in a godly manner. Earnestly seek to understand others’ concerns and perspectives. Look out for

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 225-246.

the interests of others. Confront in a gracious manner. Give sincere praise and encouragement”. By starting the negotiation with affirmation, you build trust and create an atmosphere of mutual respect. This can make it easier for both parties to be open and honest about their needs and concerns.

- **U – Understand:** The third step is to understand interests. This means listening deeply to the other person’s perspective and trying to understand their underlying needs and concerns. Conflict often arises because of unmet interests or misunderstandings. By understanding the interests of the other party, you can find creative solutions that address those needs. As Ken Sande notes, “The better you understand others’ interests (as well as your own), the more likely you are to develop acceptable solutions.” To understand interests, ask clarifying questions, paraphrase what you hear, and seek to see the issue from the other person’s point of view. This step is about empathy and humility—putting aside your own agenda and truly trying to see things from the other side. When both sides feel understood, it lays the groundwork for finding common ground.
- **S – Search:** The fourth step is to search for creative solutions. Once you have a clear understanding of the issues and interests, it’s time to brainstorm possible solutions. This is the “inventing” phase of negotiation, where you and the other party come up with ideas for resolving the conflict. The goal is to generate as many options as possible, without judgment or evaluation. As Sande advises, “When brainstorming, separate inventing from deciding. This is time to be creative so don’t criticize suggestions.” Encourage both sides to think outside the box and consider options that might not be obvious. It can be helpful to use a neutral third party (like a mediator or a pastor) to facilitate this process and ensure that everyone has a chance to contribute. Remember, the focus at this stage is quantity—aim for a wide range of solutions. This creativity often leads to solutions that meet the legitimate needs of both parties, rather than one side “winning” and the other “losing.”

- **E – Evaluate:** The final step is to evaluate options objectively and reasonably. After generating a list of possible solutions, it's time to assess each one and determine which is most feasible and fair. This step is the “deciding” phase of negotiation. During evaluation, each party should consider the pros and cons of each option, keeping in mind the interests of both sides. It's important to evaluate solutions based on their merits rather than emotions or past grievances. As Sande<sup>26</sup> writes, “Evaluate options objectively and reasonably (evaluate, don't argue). Seek objective opinions from trusted advisors or ask them to mediate”. This might involve asking questions like: Does this solution address the core interests of both parties? Is it realistic and enforceable? Does it uphold justice and fairness? Once you have evaluated the options, you can work together to choose the best solution or combination of solutions. It's important to reach an agreement that both sides can live with, even if it's not exactly what they originally wanted. The goal is a win-win outcome where both parties feel that their needs are met as much as possible.

By following the PAUSE principle, pastors can guide conflicts toward resolution in a constructive way. The process ensures that the negotiation remains focused on the issues, not on personal attacks, and that all parties are given a chance to be heard. Importantly, the PAUSE principle is rooted in biblical principles of humility, love, and seeking the common good. It reminds negotiators that conflict resolution is not about “winning” at all costs, but about resolving conflict in a way that strengthens relationships and reflects God's will. As Sande<sup>27</sup> puts it, The PAUSE principle of biblical negotiation provides a practical way to resolve personal, church, business, and multi-million dollar legal conflicts. Whether it's mediating a disagreement between two church members or helping a couple work through marital issues, the PAUSE framework can be a valuable tool for pastors to bring about peace and reconciliation.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p 20.



*Figure 2: The “PAUSE” Principle of Negotiation*

## The “GOSPEL” Principle for Mediation: Acting as a Mediator

In addition to negotiation, pastors may find themselves in the role of mediator, helping -two or more parties resolve a conflict. A mediator is someone who facilitates communication between conflicting parties, guiding them toward a mutually acceptable solution. Ken Sande’s<sup>28</sup> *Leading Christians Through Conflict* approach to mediation is encapsulated in the GOSPEL principle, which provides a framework for mediating conflicts with a gospel-centered perspective. GOSPEL is an acronym that stands for Greetings and ground rules, Opening statements, Story-telling, Problem clarification, Exchange of offers, and Listening . This structured approach ensures that the mediation process is respectful, thorough, and centered on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Here’s a breakdown of the GOSPEL principle:

- **G – Greetings and Ground Rules:** The first step in mediation is to establish a respectful and safe environment. This process involves greeting the parties, introducing yourself as the mediator (if appropriate), and setting the ground rules for the mediation. Ground rules might include things like listening to each person without interrupting, speaking one at a time, treating each other with respect, and keeping the discussion focused on the issues. By starting with greetings and ground rules, you create a foundation of mutual respect and trust. This sets the tone for the rest of the mediation.
- **O – Opening Statements:** Next, each party is given an opportunity to make an opening statement. In an opening statement, a

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<sup>28</sup> Sande, p. 34.

person can briefly describe the conflict from their perspective, state their concerns, and explain what they hope to achieve. The goal is to provide a clear understanding of the problem and the desired outcome. It's important that each person is heard without interruption during their opening statement. After each person has spoken, you can summarize what you heard to ensure that you and the other party understand their perspective. This step is crucial for setting the stage for the rest of the mediation; it ensures that everyone is on the same page about what the conflict is and what needs to be resolved.

- **S – Story-telling:** After opening statements, the mediation moves into the “story-telling” phase. In this step, each party is encouraged to share their side of the story in detail. This process includes not just the facts of the situation, but also their feelings, needs, and the impact the conflict has had on them. Story-telling allows people to express themselves fully and for the mediator to gain a deeper understanding of the emotional and relational aspects of the conflict. It's important that both sides have an opportunity to tell their story without interruption. The mediator may ask clarifying questions to ensure that they understand the narrative from each perspective. By hearing each other's stories, the parties often gain empathy and insight into the other person's point of view. This can be a transformative moment in the mediation process.
- **P – Problem Clarification:** Once both sides have had a chance to tell their stories, the mediator helps the parties clarify the specific issues and concerns at hand. This step involves identifying the core problems or interests that are driving the conflict. The mediator might ask questions like: What are the main points of disagreement? What are the underlying needs or interests of each party? What outcomes would each party like to see? By focusing on the problems rather than the people, the mediator helps the parties zero in on the issues that need to be resolved. This step ensures that everyone is clear about what they are negotiating. It also helps avoid confusion and ensures that the mediation stays on track.

- **E – Exchange of Offers:** In the “exchange of offers” phase, the mediator facilitates a discussion where each party presents their proposed solutions or compromises. This step is like the negotiation phase, but in mediation, the solutions are typically not imposed by the mediator; rather, they are generated by the parties themselves. The mediator’s role is to help both sides explore options and to encourage each party to put forward a proposal that meets their interests. This process might involve brainstorming together or one party making an initial offer and the other responding. The key is that the mediator remains neutral and helps the parties find common ground. It’s important that the exchange of offers is done in a spirit of openness and cooperation. The mediator may also provide feedback or suggestions if needed, but the final solutions should come from the parties.
- **L – Listening:** The final step in the GOSPEL principle is listening again—this time to the proposed solutions and to each other’s reactions. After the exchange of offers, both parties will likely have feedback and concerns about the proposed solutions. The mediator will facilitate a discussion where each party can express their thoughts on the other’s proposal. This process might involve clarifying misunderstandings, asking for further details, or suggesting adjustments. The mediator listens to each side’s perspective and helps them find common ground. This step is a crucial phase because it allows the parties to refine the solutions and to ensure that both sides are comfortable with the proposed outcomes. The mediator may also help the parties craft a final agreement or plan that addresses all the issues. By emphasizing listening, the GOSPEL principle ensures that the mediation remains a collaborative process, with the parties working together to reach a solution that satisfies both of them.

The GOSPEL principle is particularly powerful because it centers the mediation on the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel, after all, is about reconciliation—God reconciling us to himself through Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-19). By following this framework, the mediator helps the parties approach their conflict in a way that reflects God’s love and grace. For

example, the emphasis on listening and understanding in GOSPEL mirrors the command to love one's neighbor as oneself and to seek first the kingdom of God (Matt. 22:39). The focus on finding mutually beneficial solutions aligns with the principle of serving others (Phil. 2:3-4). By mediating through the GOSPEL principle, pastors can create an environment where the parties are encouraged to forgive, reconcile, and show grace to one another. "Conflict is a violation of harmony. If you participate in it, you're part of the problem, not the solution."<sup>29</sup> Mediators who follow the GOSPEL principle help the parties leave the conflict not as adversaries but as reconciled brothers and sisters, demonstrating the love of Christ to each other and to the world

It's worth noting that the GOSPEL principle is not a rigid script; rather, it's a flexible guide that can be adapted to the specific needs of the parties. The mediator may need to adjust the order or focus of the steps based on the dynamics of the conflict; however, the core elements of greeting, opening statements, story-telling, problem clarification, exchange of offers, and listening are generally applicable. By following this process, pastors can effectively mediate conflicts, even complex ones. The GOSPEL principle provides a clear roadmap that helps both parties feel heard and respected, and it increases the likelihood of reaching a fair and lasting resolution. In essence, the GOSPEL principle transforms the mediation process into a redemptive experience where the gospel is lived out in the context of resolving conflict.

## CONCLUSION

Biblical peacemaking is a calling and a ministry that every pastor should embrace. By understanding conflict as a natural part of life and a potential opportunity for growth, pastors can approach it with wisdom and grace. Conflict can indeed be used for God's glory when believers respond in ways that honor him—whether it's through reconciliation, forgiveness, or creative problem-solving. Recognizing the slippery slope of conflict, pastors can intervene early and guide their congregations toward healthy resolution. And by equipping themselves with practical tools like the PAUSE principle for negotiation and the GOSPEL prin-

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<sup>29</sup> W. Dyer, *Everyday Wisdom for Success* (Carlsbad CA: Hay House, 2006), p. 47.

ciple for mediation, pastors can effectively mediate disputes and help people reconcile with one another.

Ultimately, the goal of biblical peacemaking is not just to end a conflict, but to transform relationships. When conflicts are resolved through the lens of the gospel, relationships become stronger, trust is restored, and the church is built up in love. By following the principles of reconciliation, forgiveness, negotiation, and mediation outlined in this chapter, pastors can be instrumental in creating a culture of peace in their churches. They can teach their congregations how to resolve differences with humility and grace, and they can lead by example in seeking peace with others. In doing so, they not only serve the people in their care but also reflect the heart of God, who is the God of peace and reconciliation.

In conclusion, biblical peacemaking is a vital aspect of pastoral ministry. It requires both knowledge and practice, but with the guidance of Scripture and the tools provided pastors can become skilled peacemakers. By defining conflict, embracing it as an opportunity, navigating the slippery slope, and practicing reconciliation and forgiveness, pastors can help their congregations experience the transformative power of God's peace. And by applying the PAUSE and GOSPEL principles, they can mediate conflicts in a way that honors God and restores relationships. As the apostle Paul wrote, "Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony" (Col. 3:14). May we all strive to be peacemakers, so that the church may truly be a community of love and unity, glorifying God amid conflict.



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## CHAPTER 7

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### **THE CHIEF/PASTOR AS SERVANT: CONTEXTUALIZING AFRICAN COMMUNAL LEADERSHIP WITH THE CHRISTOLOGICAL MODEL OF SERVANTHOOD**

Currently, leadership seems to be in crisis—whether in politics, the corporate world, or church institutions. Because of this situation, finding authentic, ethical, and sustainable ways to lead has never been more important.<sup>1</sup> The old, individualistic style of leadership, which usually relies on strict hierarchies, hoarding power, and chasing personal success, has repeatedly fallen short. All too often, it leads to corruption, disconnected teams, and fractured societies. In response to these failures, a fresh framework is necessary: one that puts people before performance and community before control.

To build this framework, two distinct approaches to servant-oriented leadership must be woven together: the biblical model lived out by Jesus Christ, and the traditional African concept of Communal (or Ubuntu) Leadership. The core idea here is that the traditional African way of leading—which is deeply rooted in collectivism, consensus, and our shared humanity<sup>2</sup>—can be enriched and given a strong theological foundation through the Christological model of servant leadership. The goal isn't to erase indigenous wisdom, but rather to shine a light on how beautifully it aligns with biblical truths. Doing so creates a strong, highly relevant leadership style for modern Africa, the Church, and the wider world.

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<sup>1</sup> Godfrey Harold and George Emedi, “*Lubunga*- Leadership: An Afro-Biblical Perspective,” *South African Baptist Theological Journal*, 21 (2012), pp. 1-12.

<sup>2</sup> P.J. Jonas, P.J. (1996). “Collectivism and Mission in a South African Context,” *Missionalia*, 24(1) (April, 1996), pp. 78-90.

This argument unfolds in four main steps. The first two steps have been accomplished in the chapter “Jesus and Servant Leadership” above in which the groundwork was established by exploring Jesus’s leadership, the divine standard, as shown in the Gospels, focusing on His motivation (*agape* love), His attitude (humility), and His actions (service); and comparing it to the highly influential secular model of servant leadership created by Robert K. Greenleaf in the 1970s. The result was an understanding of the differences in their origins, motivations, and end goals of these approaches with a clear expression of the superiority of Jesus’ servant leadership.

With Jesus model of servant leadership in mind,<sup>3</sup> the last two steps must be explored in this chapter. First, one must turn attention to the African continent to explore traditional communal leadership systems. One must look at how chiefs, councils of elders, and community assemblies functioned, and dive into the core values that guide this style of leadership: *Ubuntu*, collectivism, respect for tradition, and accountability. This section will lay down the rich cultural “soil” where the seed of biblical servant leadership can take root.

In the final and most crucial part, one will connect the dots between the Christological model and the African communal ethos. One will uncover the striking similarities between Christian *agape* and African *Ubuntu*, between Jesus washing His disciples’ feet and the African leader’s duty to serve their people, and between biblical stewardship and communal accountability. This blend offers a powerful way to tackle the tough issues facing modern African societies and churches today, such as corruption, ethnic divides, and the lingering effects of authoritarian rule. By anchoring the relational wisdom of Africa in the self-sacrificing love of Christ, a way to lead that is both culturally genuine and spiritually life changing is revealed.

## AFRICAN COMMUNAL LEADERSHIP<sup>4</sup>

To connect biblical servanthood with a specific culture, one must first understand that culture. Africa is incredibly diverse, but many of its cultures

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<sup>3</sup> See the chapter, “Jesus and Servant Leadership” above.

<sup>4</sup> For an examination of Leadership Structure and Styles within African Traditional Religions see Appendix A below.

share a common philosophy when it comes to leadership and community. This approach, often called “Communal Leadership” or “*Ubuntu* Leadership,” puts the well-being of the group ahead of the desires of the individual. It is based on ancient wisdom that has survived and adapted through pre-colonial, colonial, and modern times.<sup>5</sup> Understanding this mindset is vital to make Christian leadership truly relevant in Africa.

## **Traditional Governance Systems and Decision-Making**

Long before modern countries were drawn on a map, African societies had highly effective ways of governing themselves. While the details varied, they generally shared a belief in spreading out authority and making decisions by consensus.<sup>6</sup> The two main pillars of this system were the Chief (or Monarch) and the Council of Elders.

In many African communities, a Chief or Monarch is at the center of leadership. Even though this role was often passed down through families, the chief rarely had absolute, unchecked power.<sup>7</sup> Their job was to manage the community's affairs, settle arguments, and protect the group's traditions and resources. Most importantly, people didn't respect the chief just because he had power; they respected him because he was wise, fair, and kept the peace. The chief was always supported—and kept in check—by a Council of Elders.<sup>8</sup> This group of respected older men (and sometimes women) provided essential advice based on a lifetime of experience. In many places, the council had a lot of power. If a chief ignored their advice or went against what the community wanted, he could lose his position.

This structure meant that decisions were made together. The focus was on finding creative solutions while respecting different viewpoints, so everyone felt heard.<sup>9</sup> Big decisions weren't just handed down from the top; they were debated in village meetings where anyone could speak up.

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<sup>5</sup> I.I. Setlhodi, “Ubuntu Leadership: An African Panacea for Improving School Performance,” *Africa Education Review*, 16 (2) (2019), pp. 126–142.

<sup>6</sup> P.T. Zeleza, “The Disciplinary, Interdisciplinary and Global Dimensions of African Studies,” *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies*. 1(2) (2006), pp. 195–220.

<sup>7</sup> Harold and Emedi, pp. 1-12.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Setlhodi, pp. 126-142.

The leader acted more like a facilitator, guiding the group until they reached an agreement everyone could live with. As facilitators, leaders rallied support, tapped into the community's skills, and worked with others for the good of the whole group.<sup>10</sup> It was less about giving orders and more about empowering people to take ownership of solutions. Leaders created safe spaces to work through conflicts and build new partnerships.<sup>11</sup> While this process might take longer than a dictator simply issuing a command, it ensured that everyone supported the final decision and kept the community united. Even when resolving crimes or disputes, the goal was restorative justice—fixing relationships and restoring harmony—rather than just punishing the offender.<sup>12</sup>

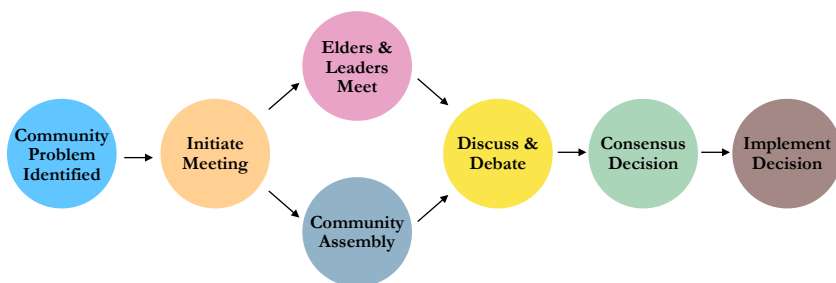


Figure 3: Typical Decision-Making Process in Traditional African Communal Leadership<sup>13</sup>

## The Core Values Underpinning Communal Leadership

Beneath these governance structures lies a set of deep cultural values that act as a moral compass for leaders. These values are built on the belief that an individual's life is completely tied to the life of the community.

<sup>10</sup> A. Beer, S. Ayres, T. Clower, F. Faller, A. Sancino, and M. Sotarauta, "Place Leadership and Regional Economic Development: A Framework for Cross-regional Analysis," *Regional Studies*, 53 (2) (2019), pp. 171-182.

<sup>11</sup> R. Bolden, A. Gulati, and G. Edwards, G. "Mobilizing Change in Public Services: Insights From Systems Leadership Development Intervention," *International Journal of Public Administration*, 43 (1) (2020), pp. 26-36.

<sup>12</sup> T Metz. "An African Theory of Good Leadership" *African Journal of Business Ethics* 12 (2) (2018) pp. 36-53.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Original heading: "Traditional African Community Decision-Making Process: Collective Approach with Community Input and Consensus."

*Ubuntu: "I am because we are"*

The most famous and foundational value in many African cultures is *Ubuntu*. This Nguni word is often translated as "I am because you are" or "humanity towards others." It is a beautiful philosophy of deep connection. *Ubuntu* is the idea that individuals, families, and nations are all an integral part of each other.<sup>14</sup> It "affirms an organic wholeness of humanity, a wholeness realized in and through other people".<sup>15</sup> Essentially, *Ubuntu* is all about relationships—relationships with family, ancestors, God, and the land itself.<sup>16</sup> As Sidhom explains:<sup>17</sup>

*Existence-in-relation sums up the pattern of the African way of life. And this encompasses within it a great deal, practically the whole universe. The African maintains a vital relationship with nature, God the deity, ancestors, the tribe, the clan, the extended family, and himself. Into each avenue he enters with his whole being, without essentially distinguishing the existence of any boundaries dividing one from the other.*

*Ubuntu* is about participation. It is the glue that binds individuals and groups together.<sup>18</sup> It teaches that you can't be fully human all by yourself; your humanity is unlocked through your relationships and responsibilities to others.<sup>19</sup> For a leader, *Ubuntu* is a strict mandate. It means one must put the community first and treat everyone with compassion, dignity, and respect. A leader with *Ubuntu* doesn't chase personal fame;

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<sup>14</sup> K. Koka, "What is Afrikan Philosophy?" in: Contributions of the African and German Philosophies to the Formation and Creation of Communities in Transition: Report on a Seminar by the Goethe-Institut Johannesburg (1998).

<sup>15</sup> C. Villa-Vicencio, C. (1997). "Telling One Another Stories: Toward a Theology of Reconciliation" in *The Reconciliation of Peoples: Challenge to the Churches (WCC Publications)*, G. Baum and H. Wells, Eds., (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> V. Mulago, "Vital Participation," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth, Eds. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), pp. 138, 143.

<sup>17</sup> S. Sidhom, "The Theological Estimate of Man," in *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, Kwesi A. Dickson and Paul Ellingworth, Eds. (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> Harold and Emedi, pp. 1-12.

<sup>19</sup> See Ibid., and T.A. Brubaker. "Servant Leadership, Ubuntu, and Leader Effectiveness in Rwanda," *Emerging Leadership Journeys*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2013), pp. 114-147.

they use their platform to lift everyone up, making sure the most vulnerable are protected. It is a philosophy of deep humility and service.

### *Collectivism and Community Welfare*

Flowing right out of *Ubuntu* is the idea of collectivism. Unlike the heavy focus on the individual found in Western cultures, traditional African societies put the group's welfare above any one person's desires.<sup>20</sup> The famous proverb, "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together," sums up this perspective perfectly. Leaders are expected to be the ultimate protectors of the community. This responsibility means focusing on development, sharing resources fairly, and making sure everyone's needs are met. A leader isn't considered successful because they are rich or powerful; they are successful if their community is united and thriving.<sup>21</sup> Leadership is a sacred trust, and resources are meant to benefit everyone, not to be hoarded by the person in charge.

### *Respect for Tradition*

Communal leadership also places a massive premium on the wisdom of the past. Leaders are the guardians of the community's culture, history, and traditions. They are expected to use ancient wisdom, oral traditions, and rituals to help make modern decisions. This approach doesn't mean being stuck in the past; it means keeping a strong connection to your roots while adapting to new challenges. The leader acts as a bridge between today's generation, the ancestors, and the spiritual life of the community. This deep respect for tradition gives the leader more authority and helps the community feel a strong sense of shared identity and pride.

### *Accountability and Responsibility*

A massive pillar of communal leadership is that leaders answer to the people. Unlike dictators, a communal leader only has power if the community trusts and supports them.<sup>22</sup> They must govern fairly, open-

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<sup>20</sup> Harold and Emedi, pp. 1-12.

<sup>21</sup> J. Toendepi, and K. Cele, "Responsible Leadership, an Afrocentric Viewpoint: Leadership as a Collective Effort.," *South African Journal of Business Management*, Vol 55, No 1 (2024), pp. 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v55i1.4337>.

<sup>22</sup> Harold and Emedi, pp. 1-12.

ly, and honestly. This expectation isn't just a nice idea; it is enforced by the council of elders and village meetings, where people can speak their minds and hold the leader accountable. If a leader abuses their power, they can be challenged and even removed. While African traditions respect chiefs, they believe that true wisdom comes from the community itself. Decisions are made together because people “belong in a bundle of life.”<sup>23</sup> African leadership is a team effort.

This structure constantly reminds the leader that they are a servant, not a master. As the ancient philosopher Lao-Tzu wrote, “A leader is best when people barely know he exists, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.”<sup>24</sup> That expression is the dream of communal leadership: empowering the community so much that they feel responsible for their own success. This strict accountability is a great defense against corruption. It is an especially important value in modern Africa, where many Christian leaders admit that the “love of power and fame” and “dictatorial” leadership styles are major problems today.<sup>25</sup>

## THE ETHOS OF AFRICAN COMMUNAL LEADERSHIP

The beautiful values of African communal leadership don't clash with the biblical model of servant leadership; in fact, they provide the perfect soil for it to grow. The core ideas of *Ubuntu*, collectivism, and accountability echo the teachings of Jesus Christ perfectly. As one contextualizes Christian leadership for Africa, one is simply pointing out these amazing similarities, allowing the message of Christ to affirm, purify, and elevate the very best parts of African leadership. The result is a way of leading that is authentically African and profoundly Christian.

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<sup>23</sup> T. Murithi T. (2006). “Practical Peacemaking Wisdom from Africa: Reflections on *Ubuntu*”. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (June 2006), p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> Tao-Tzu (1996). *Tao Te Ching: A Parallel Translation Collection*, Compiled by B. Boisen (Boston: GNOMAD Publication, 1996), Chapter 17.

<sup>25</sup> P. Cincala. “Christian Leadership in Africa: Interview with an African Cohort of Christian Leaders,” *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2019), pp. 84-93.

## The Theological Resonance of Ubuntu and Agape

The strongest connection between these two worlds is the link between the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* and the Christian concept of *agape* love. *Ubuntu's* core message, "I am because we are," highlights a deep truth: humans are wired for connection and community.<sup>26</sup> The Bible says the exact same thing using the metaphor of the Church as the "Body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). In a body, every part is unique, but they are all connected. If one part hurts, the whole body hurts. As the Apostle Paul wrote, "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Cor. 12:26, NIV). That metaphor is the theological version of *Ubuntu*.

The biblical model, however, takes this truth a step further by providing the ultimate fuel for this connection: *agape* love. While *Ubuntu* declares one *should* care for each other (Vilakazi 1991:7), *agape* gives the divine power to do it. Jesus raised the bar when He said, "love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). This command isn't just loving someone because they are in your family or your tribe; it is a sacrificial love modeled after Christ giving His life for us. When a leader's dedication to *Ubuntu* is powered by the *agape* love of Christ, it turns a good social habit into a spiritual act of worship. It gives the leader the strength to serve sacrificially, even when it's hard, for the spiritual good of their people. The beautiful obligations of *Ubuntu* find their perfect engine in the redemptive love of Christ.

## Humility in Action: The Foot-Washing and the Chief's Council

The African tradition of a leader humbly consulting with the community mirrors the humility of Jesus—what Harold and Emedi<sup>27</sup> note reflects the biblical idea of the priesthood of all believers. Think about a traditional chief: despite his high status, he sits down with the elders and listens to their advice before making a decision. That is practical humility. It is an admission that the leader doesn't know everything and

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<sup>26</sup> G.M. Setilona, G.M (1979) "Where are we in African Theology?" in Appiah-Kubi and Torres, *African Theology en Route*, Appiah-Kubi and Torres, Eds. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), p. 63.

<sup>27</sup> Harold and Emedi, pp. 1-12.

that wisdom is shared among the people. It is choosing to put the group's needs above your own ego.<sup>28</sup>

This tradition looks even more profound when we view it through the story of Jesus washing feet in John 13. Jesus, the ultimate authority in the universe, gets down on the floor to wash dirty feet. It is the ultimate example of a leader lowering their status to serve and teach. For an African Christian leader, this image is the perfect cure for the “Big Man” syndrome—a modern problem where leaders act like untouchable dictators who demand to be served.<sup>29</sup> The foot-washing story proves that serving people doesn't make you look weak; it proves your true authority. A leader who listens to their people, cares for the marginalized, and does the “dirty work” isn't weak. They are showing a secure, Christ-like strength that doesn't need to show off. Blending Christ's humility with the African model protects the leader from the corrupting influence of power, reminding them that their position—just like the chief's—is a platform for service, not a throne.

### **Service and Accountability: The Leader as Steward**

The African rule that a leader answers to the community is the foundation of good governance. A leader is just holding their position in trust, and they only keep it if they take care of the people and the land. This idea matches up perfectly with the biblical concept of stewardship.<sup>30</sup>

When Jesus said, “whoever wants to be first must be your slave” (Matthew 20:27), He was telling his disciples to view leadership as a massive responsibility, not a right. A steward is someone hired to manage someone else's property. In the Christian view, a leader is a steward of God's people. Their time, talents, and power don't belong to them; they are tools given by God to serve others.

This theological truth makes the African value of accountability even stronger. The leader isn't just accountable horizontally to the com-

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> E. Amofo, “Improving African Christian Leadership: A Christological Approach to Overcoming the ‘Big-Man’ Syndrome,” *African Journal of Evangelical Theology*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (2015), pp. 153-174.

<sup>30</sup> R. Tambulasi and H. Kayuni, H. (2005). Can African Feet Divorce Western Shoes? The Case of ‘Ubuntu’ and Democratic Good Governance in Malawi,” *Nordic Journal of African Studies* Vol. 14, No. 2 (2005), pp. 147-161.

munity and the elders; they are accountable vertically to God. This double layer of accountability is a fantastic defense against corruption. Knowing that you will eventually have to explain your leadership to God (Hebrews 13:17) brings a level of integrity that fear of human punishment just can't match. When you combine African communal accountability with biblical stewardship, leadership becomes a sacred calling. A leader's success isn't judged by their popularity or bank account, but by how faithfully they cared for the flock God entrusted to them.

## Challenges and Opportunities in Contemporary Africa

Blending biblical servanthood with African communalism isn't just a nice theory; it is an urgent, practical solution for Africa today. The continent is dealing with massive challenges, many of which boil down to bad leadership: corruption, tribalism, economic inequality, and dictatorships. Many African Christian leaders openly admit that the church struggles with these same issues, pointing to greed, political games, and dictatorial pastors as major moral failures.<sup>31</sup>

An integrated servant leadership approach offers a powerful cure:

- **Against Corruption:** The idea of divine stewardship—knowing you answer to God for how you handle resources—kills the urge to steal from the public. It changes how a leader views money: it isn't loot to be taken, but a trust to be managed for everyone's benefit.
- **Against Tribalism:** *Agape* love crosses all ethnic lines. When combined with the idea that we are all one "Body of Christ," it destroys the toxic divisions of tribalism. A servant leader treats everyone equally, seeing them not as rivals from another tribe, but as fellow humans made in God's image.
- **Against Authoritarianism:** The image of Jesus washing feet, combined with the African tradition of consensus, directly attacks the "Big Man" style of leadership. It champions persuasion over force, listening over yelling, and empowering people over dominating them.

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<sup>31</sup> Cincala, pp. 84-93.

The Christian Church is one of the most influential forces in Africa, which puts it in the perfect position to model this kind of leadership. If pastors lead their churches using this biblically grounded, culturally rich approach, the Church can spark massive social and political change. As Christian leaders start to lead with *agape* love, radical humility, and honest stewardship, they can help heal the wounds of the past. They can build a future where African communities thrive and proudly say, “we did it ourselves,” while knowing that all the glory belongs to God.

## CONCLUSION

The world is desperate for a kinder, more effective way to lead, and the perfect answer can be found by blending biblical servanthood with African communalism. The traditional African leadership style—with its focus on community, consensus, and the beautiful philosophy of *Ubuntu*—provides an incredible cultural framework. This framework is affirmed, deepened, and perfected by the servant leadership of Jesus Christ.

When we bring this profound theology into the world of African communal traditions, magic happens. The relational beauty of *Ubuntu* finds its ultimate meaning in the Body of Christ. The African leader’s duty to listen and serve is perfectly modeled by Jesus washing feet. The traditional value of answering to the people is strengthened by the reality of answering to God. This blend doesn’t erase African identity; it enriches it, providing a strong moral compass for African Christian leaders facing the complexities of the 21st century.

For a continent still dealing with the scars of colonialism, corruption, and conflict, this “Chief as Servant” (or Pastor as Servant) model is more than just an academic theory—it is a blueprint for real change. It challenges leaders to measure their success not by the power they hoard, but by the people they empower; not by the money they make, but by the community they build; and not by the fear they instill, but by the love they show. By embracing a leadership style that is both authentically African and faithfully Christian, a new generation of leaders can rise. They will be ready to guide their communities toward justice, peace, and true prosperity, proving once and for all that the greatest leader of all is the one who becomes the servant of all.



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## CHAPTER 8

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### CONCLUSION

The journey through the preceding seven chapters reveals a profound pivot in the understanding of church administration. Far from being a mundane, secular necessity or a distraction from “true” spiritual work, church administration emerges as a deeply theological and spiritual endeavor, a sacred stewardship, and a vital expression of pastoral care. By integrating biblical theology, Christological servant leadership, practical management dynamics, and contextualized African communal wisdom, this volume establishes that administration is, at its core, the faithful orchestration of God's resources for the fulfillment of His redemptive mission.

The foundational premise established in the early chapters is that administration is rooted in the very nature of God. From the orderly progression of Creation to the meticulous design of the New Jerusalem in the Consummation, God reveals Himself as the Supreme Administrator. Humanity's original mandate in Eden was administrative—to steward, cultivate, and manage creation on God's behalf. Although the Fall fractured this mandate, introducing toil, relational alienation, and the abuse of power, the redemptive work of Christ restores the capacity for godly administration.

Within this redemptive framework, the church is beautifully described as an **“organized organism.”** It is a living, breathing entity indwelt by the Holy Spirit, yet it requires divine structure to function effectively. The spiritual gift of administration (*kubernesis*)—likened to a helmsman steering a ship—is bestowed by the Spirit to ensure that the church navigates the complexities of ministry with order and peace (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40). Therefore, a Christian philosophy of administration rejects secular agency theory, which prioritizes profit and effi-

ciency, in favor of a stewardship paradigm that prioritizes disciple-making, spiritual formation, and Kingdom impact.

At the heart of biblical administration is the Christological model of servant leadership. While secular models, such as Robert K. Greenleaf's, advocate for a "servant-first" mentality aimed at human flourishing and autonomy, the biblical model is infinitely deeper. Jesus's leadership is driven by *agape* love, grounded in radical humility, and demonstrated through sacrificial service—ultimately culminating in the cross. The Christian administrator's authority is not self-generated but delegated by God, and the ultimate goal is not mere self-actualization, but the spiritual transformation of the follower into the image of Christ.

This Christological model finds profound resonance and practical application within the African context through the ethos of **Communal Leadership** and *Ubuntu* ("I am because we are"). Traditional African governance, characterized by consensus-building, the wisdom of the Council of Elders, and the leader as a protector of the community, provides fertile cultural soil for biblical servanthood. When the relational beauty of *Ubuntu* is empowered by the *agape* love of Christ, it creates a robust defense against modern crises of leadership, such as corruption, tribalism, and the authoritarian "Big Man" syndrome.

The five classical functions of administration—Planning, Staffing, Organizing, Leading, and Controlling—are redeemed and repurposed for the local church:

- **Planning** becomes an exercise in spiritual discernment. It is the process of aligning the church's local vision with the Great Commission, setting SMART goals not for corporate success, but for effective disciple-making.
- **Staffing** is reimagined as a discipleship task. It involves identifying, equipping, and deploying the spiritual gifts of believers (both paid and volunteer) to build up the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-12).
- **Organizing** is the stewardship of human, physical, and financial resources, ensuring that the church's structure facilitates ministry

rather than hindering it, much like the apostles' delegation to the deacons in Acts 6.

- **Leading** relies on soft power and influence rather than dictatorial control. It requires casting a compelling vision and maintaining impeccable character, rooted in a daily abiding in Christ (John 15).
- **Controlling (Evaluating)** is transformed into biblical accountability. It is a grace-filled process of assessing ministry effectiveness and adapting forms to ensure the unchanging meaning of the Gospel reaches the community.

Because the church is composed of redeemed yet fallible human beings, conflict is inevitable. Biblical administration, however, views conflict not merely as a disruption, but as an opportunity to glorify God, serve others, and grow in Christlikeness (The 4 Gs' of Peace-making). The pursuit of *Shalom*—a thick, holistic peace rooted in justice and righteousness—is central to the process of maintaining relational unity with the church, therefore, church leaders must be vigilant against the “Slippery Slope of Conflict,” where unmet desires morphs into demands, judgments, and ultimately, punitive actions (peace-breaking or peace-faking). By performing “idol-surgery” on their own hearts and removing the log from their own eye, leaders can approach conflict with humility required for biblical restoration.

When navigating these disputes, the church administrator acts as both a negotiator and a mediator. Utilizing tools like the **PAUSE principle** (Prepare, Affirm, Understand, Search, Evaluate) allows leaders to de-escalate tensions and find mutually beneficial, God-honoring solutions. Furthermore, the **GOSPEL principle** equips pastors to mediate disputes by creating safe spaces for storytelling, problem clarification, and the exchange of grace.

Church administration is an act of doxology—a profound expression of worship. It is the mechanism through which the mission of God find its manifestation in the tangible outworking in the daily life of the congregation. By embracing the Christological model of servant leadership, honoring contextual wisdom like African communalism, executing practical management with spiritual discernment, and pro-

tecting relational unity through biblical peace-making, a pastor can cultivate a vibrant, healthy, and mission-driven congregation. The pastor, therefore is not called to be a corporate CEO, nor a detached spiritual mystic, but a faithful steward and a servant-helmsman of the local church. When administration is executed with a spiritual focus through the heart of a shepherd, and with the towel of a servant, it ceases to be a burden. Instead, it becomes the very scaffolding which is used so that church can fulfill the mission of God by ensuring that all things are done decently, in order, and ultimately, for the glory of God.

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## APPENDIX A

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### A COMPARISON OF RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP STRUCTURES

In the *Introduction to the Series*, Rodgers identifies a critical focus of the Africa Theology Series: “[authors] were instructed to focus on application within four given African contexts: African Traditional Religion, Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Neo-Pentecostalism.”<sup>1</sup> As a part of the ATS library, this volume must also consider the implications of healthy Church Administration in the context of competing worldview practices. While “administration” principles are fairly universal and can be found to be practiced to some degree in each of these contexts, the leadership structure in which they are applied vary greatly; therefore, this chapter will provide an overview of leadership structures and styles within African Traditional Religions, Neo-Pentecostalism, the Roman Catholic Church, and Islam in comparison with Baptist practices.

Before exploring other worldview practices, one should have a general understanding of Baptist leadership structures as a baseline for

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Rodgers, *Introduction to the Series*, Africa Theology Series (Niamey, Niger: SOLA Printing, 2021), p.12. See the *Introduction* for a helpful explanation as to the decision to focus on these four worldviews. The reduction to these four worldviews does not fail to recognize that “over 3,000 different ethnic groups speaking more than 2,100 different languages in all of Africa... (practicing) a variety of religions, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and traditional religions specific to their ethnic group.” (Ibid., note 5). Rather, some limits established by focusing on the most widely practiced or fastest growing religions/worldviews in Africa.

comparison.<sup>2</sup> Leadership within Baptist ecclesiology<sup>3</sup> is rooted in congregational polity which affirms the autonomy of the local church under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the authority of Scripture. This understanding is a lived-out expression of the priesthood of every believer—the conviction that every Christian has direct access to the Father through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit because of the saving work of Jesus. “The Baptist model of a church rests on the concept of the priesthood of believers. A church is made up of persons who have exercised their God-given competency by believing in Jesus as Savior and Lord and by voluntarily associating with a particular fellowship of believers.”<sup>4</sup> This foundational doctrine impacts the understanding of leadership as “Each believer priest in the fellowship is equal to all of the others. Therefore, no one is in authority over all. Thus, decisions are made by the community of priests seeking to know the will of the head of the church, the great High Priest, Jesus Christ. They do this by prayer, Bible study, meditation, discussion and decision.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, each congregation is self-governing, with final *human* authority residing in the gathered membership rather than any external authorities or hierarchies. Leadership structures do exist in the Baptist church, however. Leadership typically includes pastors and deacons with some congregations setting aside elders as well. These roles are distinct, yet complimentary. Typically, “Pastors/Elders provide spiritual oversight [preaching and vision], and the Deacons should facilitate the smooth

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<sup>2</sup> The Africa Theology Series is “written from a Baptist point of view. That is not to say that other evangelicals are wrong or illegitimate, but that there will be a consistency to the authorship of this series. The writers of each volume will come from various countries around Sub-Saharan Africa, but each will be Baptist and writing from a Baptist perspective...to ensure consistency in approach, hermeneutical balance, and ecclesiological agreement.” Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>3</sup> For a more complete consideration of ecclesiology, see Jones Ndzi and Coye Still III, *The Doctrine of the Church*, Africa Theology Series (Niamey, Niger: SOLA Printing, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> “Baptists: The Priesthood of *The Believer* or of *Believers*?” article on Baptist Distinctives website (<https://www.baptistdistinctives.org/resources/articles/the-priesthood-of-the-believer-or-of-believers/index.html>) accessed on 21 March 2026.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

running of the church [service and administration].”<sup>6</sup> The leaders, then, are accountable to the congregation which exercises authority to appoint leaders, make major decisions, and discipline members.<sup>7</sup>

Theologically, therefore, Baptist—reflecting on the priesthood of all believers and the autonomy of the local church—confess a leadership style that is ideally servant-oriented, participatory, and covenantal.<sup>8</sup> Such a perspective emphasizes shared responsibility rather than a “clerical” over “laity” dominance. In summary, in unpacking the basics of leadership, Baptists view **authority** under the Lordship of Christ as residing in Scripture and the congregation; **leadership structure** as congregational; **leadership style** as servant and participatory; **accountability** is maintained by the congregation. With a very basic overview of a Baptist position, one can explore leadership structures and styles of other religious organizations and look for common ground that can serve as *bridges* for conversation and divergent understandings that are *barriers* to conversation that must be addressed.

## AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS

The term ATR can sometimes be confusing for those outside of Sub-Saharan Africa. Rodgers provides a concise explanation:<sup>9</sup>

African Traditional Religion is not really a codified religion with a specific text and teaching, but is instead, a loosely held set of spiritual principles that are commonly found

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<sup>6</sup> Norman C. Ronne, *Baptist Principles for Church Members* for The Baptist Union of South Africa, 2015, p. 29 downloaded from <https://baptistunion.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Baptist-Principals-for-Church-Member.pdf> on 21 March 2026.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-29; 32-34.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. For a consideration of how congregational forms of church governance often align with African communal patterns of shared participation while noting the potential pitfalls caused by cultural hierarchies or weak leadership formation, see Adeyemo Tokunboh, ed., *Africa Bible Commentary* (Nairobi: WordAlive, 2006), p. 1303; and David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 378–379, 698–729.

<sup>9</sup> Rogers, p. 12. See also pp. 15-22 for an overview of African Cosmology and Worldview (particularly the Animistic outlook) as they inform ATR.

across the continent...ATR includes concepts that are specific to Animism as well as a belief in the spirit world and its influence over daily life. Magic and witchcraft play a dominant role in ATR, and it is simply an attempt to somehow mitigate, or even leverage, the spiritual forces that influence Africans daily. ATR is more of an implicit part of the worldview and cosmology of Africa as it is an actual religion. It underlies the surface of every African's perspective, to a certain degree, and often other religious forms, like Islam and Catholicism, are just a veneer thinly laid over the top of ATR.

ATR reflect various community-based leadership structures rather than formal hierarchies. Leadership roles include chiefs, elders, diviners, and priests, each functioning within a network of spiritual and social authority. Authority is most often derived from a combination of tradition, ancestry, and communal recognition, rather than formal ordination or election. ATR leadership and authority are inseparable from communal identity, ancestral continuity, and the pursuit of social harmony. Leadership *style and structure*, therefore, are communal, consultative, and integrative, often blending religious, political, and social roles. To gain a better understanding for comparative analysis, one should consider the cosmological foundations, leadership structures that exist, dominant leadership styles, and concluding observations of bridges and barriers between ATR and Baptists.

### **Cosmological Foundations of Leadership in ATR**

Leadership in ATR is rooted in a worldview that integrates the spiritual and material realms. Mbiti observes that in African thought, "the individual does not and cannot exist alone... he owes his existence to other people."<sup>10</sup> Importantly, the list of other people including "past generations."<sup>11</sup> As a result, understanding of both one's own identity and authority for one's life is placed within an *intergenerational* community rather

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<sup>10</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1969), p.108.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

than autonomous or individualistic leadership structures.<sup>12</sup> Within ATR practices, this communal reality is reinforced through the belief in the role of living presence of ancestors, who remain active participants in the moral and spiritual life of the community, thus, sustaining continuity between the past and present.<sup>13</sup> Prioritizing unity, ATR practice rituals oriented toward maintaining “harmony and respect within communities.”<sup>14</sup> Bediako similarly asserts that ATR consciousness is structured around relational belonging, mediation, and communal solidarity.<sup>15</sup>

Leadership, then, in ATR is rooted in a worldview that integrates the spiritual and material realms. Reality is understood as a unified system involving: a Supreme Being;<sup>16</sup> Lesser deities and spirits; Ancestors; the living community. This multi-tiered cosmology is often initially expressed in cultures around Sub-Saharan Africa in a particular expression of a creation story:<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., See pp. 25-27 and his discussion of the “living-dead” and ongoing relationship between ancestors and the community. Mbiti will argue for an understanding of Jesus that incorporates this view of the role of ancestors. Similarly, Kwame Bediako argues that African Christian identity must be understood in continuity with pre-Christian religious heritage, emphasizing that conversion does not erase but rather assumes and transforms existing cultural structures of belonging and meaning [*Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum, 1992), pp. 225–227]. In later work, Bediako appropriates ancestral categories in his interpretation of Christ as “ancestor,” “[Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective,” in *Emerging Voices in Global Theology*, ed. W. Dyrness (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 117–118]. For a helpful, concise critique of Mbiti’s incorporation of such an understanding of ancestors into his Christology, see Lwandiso Dlokweni, “Jesus as Ancestor? Evaluating John Mbiti’s Christology” on The Gospel Coalition Africa website (<https://africa.thegospelcoalition.org/article/jesus-as-ancestor-evaluating-john-mbitis-christology/>) accessed on 21 March 2026.

<sup>14</sup> Mbiti, pp. 209–210 (on morality, harmony, and communal ethics).

<sup>15</sup> Bediako, “Jesus in African Culture,” p. 117-118.

<sup>16</sup> Rodgers points out that “unlike other animists, Africans universally believe in a single God who is all-powerful and all-knowing, and who created everything including man.” *Introduction*, p. 16.

<sup>17</sup> E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religions: A Definition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), p. 161.

All over Africa, there are places each of which is considered to be the sacred city, the sacred grove, or the sacred spot, especially because it is believed, according to the people's cosmology, that the place is the center of the world, the place where creation began, where the human race has its cradle, and from where the race dispersed all over the earth.

Considering this communal cosmology of God, spirits, ancestors, and the living, several points of understanding are necessary. Regarding a Supreme Being:<sup>18</sup>

In most of the [creation] stories, God sees and loves His creation, but He is either indifferent, fearful, or angry with man. In most of the stories, God placed man in the world and either man discovered fire and burned the bush, or he killed and ate other animals which caused God to dislike and distrust man. God then either punishes man or in many cases He runs away from man and goes to the heavens. **There is a sense in each creation story that God is unhappy with man and that He is distant and disinterested in the affairs of man.**

This understanding of an all-powerful God who is unconcerned with the day-to-day experiences of humanity creates a problem. "He is a God who *will* punish, and He is a God who *can* help if He chooses to, but often He is too far away to be reached, and so it is necessary for extraordinary measures to be taken to get God's attention."<sup>19</sup> This dilemma results in the necessity of some form of intermediary in the form of a "host of ancestral spirits, angels, demons, clan spirits, nature spirits, and magical forces that are very close and very present, which

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<sup>18</sup> Rodgers, p. 17 (emphasis added).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. (emphasis in the original).

one must appeal to in order to get to God.”<sup>20</sup> In this context, one understands better the significance of both the ongoing perception of ancestors (as mediators who are more approachable than other spirits) and the living community. Leadership, therefore, is not merely administrative but *mediatory*, maintaining harmony between the visible and invisible worlds. Religious leaders function as keepers of this balance, ensuring the well-being of the community.<sup>21</sup>

## Leadership Structures in ATR

### *Supreme and Political Leaders*

In many African societies, political and religious leadership are intertwined. Kings or chiefs often serve both administrative and spiritual roles forming what scholars describe as *sacral kingship*. Rulers function not merely as administrative heads but as stewards or custodians of the cosmic order, responsible for maintaining harmony between the human community, the ancestors, and the spiritual world. For example, in several African kingdoms, rulers preside over rituals essential for communal prosperity and stability. To this end, Mbiti observes that African leadership is embedded in religious beliefs, where “the ruler often per-

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid. Rodgers refers to the “excluded middle” which is a term coined by missionary anthropologist Paul Hiebert, to describe a category in the spiritual world that is often overlooked or ‘excluded’ by people in the West. Those in the West often see the present world in scientific terms and the future world after death in religious terms, but they fail to answer the spiritual questions about the present world in spiritual terms. Thus, they fail to offer answers to the difficult spiritual questions of daily life which forces African Christians to return to their ATR roots, which does offer answers, even if they are not biblical ones. Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 196.

<sup>21</sup> Some biblical parallels can be seen, especially in the Old Testament, of the blending of spiritual and community leadership (see the role of elders in Ex 18:13-26; Dt 1:9-18).

forms priestly functions on behalf of the people.”<sup>22</sup> In this type of *sacral kingship* leadership, authority, then, is validated through both communal recognition and spiritual sanction.<sup>23</sup>

### *Councils of Elders*<sup>24</sup>

At the core of ATR community leadership is the role of elders, either in a more “formal” deliberative body or “informal” recognition of wisdom. Elders are often responsible for governance, dispute resolution, and moral guidance. Elders are selected not through formal ordination but through recognized wisdom, age, moral integrity, and social standing. Decisions are typically reached through consensus, reflecting a participatory leadership model in which legitimacy arises from collective agree-

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<sup>22</sup> Mbiti, pp. 177-178. Multiple examples can be identified and often have different points of focus. For example, among the Yoruba, the *oba* (king) plays a ritual role in annual festivals that ensure fertility and communal well-being, while among the Shilluk of South Sudan, the king (*reth*) is viewed as a sacred figure whose physical condition symbolizes the health of the nation [E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Divine Kingship of the Shilluk of the Nilotic Sudan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948), 12–15]. Similarly, among the Gade of Nigeria, leadership is organized around a central figure supported by lineage heads and councils, combining political authority with ancestral legitimacy and ritual responsibility [C. K. Meek, *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria* (London: Oxford University Press, 1931), 2:150–55].

<sup>23</sup> See Apostle Christian Tsekpoe’s discussion on the role of oath taking, especially the understanding that “even though the chief is the leader of the community and yields power and authority over his subjects, the oath places him under control and makes him responsible to his subjects as well”. The public taking of oaths becomes an acknowledgement of the communal nature of leadership (“African Traditional Oath-Swearing: Reflections from a Ghanaian Pentecostal Perspective,” A Paper Presented at The Church of Pentecost Royals’ Conference Held at Pentecost Convention Centre on January 8, 2017, p.6) Accessed at [https://www.academia.edu/40410331/African\\_Traditional\\_Oath\\_Swearing\\_Reflections\\_from\\_a\\_Ghanaian\\_Pentecostal](https://www.academia.edu/40410331/African_Traditional_Oath_Swearing_Reflections_from_a_Ghanaian_Pentecostal) on 22 March 2026

<sup>24</sup> Peter Onyango Onyoyo makes a pointed distinction between “Council of Elders” and “Elders in Council,” “A Theory of Gerontocracy in the African Customary Law” (see especially pp. 5-10) downloaded from: [https://www.academia.edu/9644458/A\\_Theory\\_of\\_Gerontocracy\\_in\\_the\\_African\\_Customary\\_Law](https://www.academia.edu/9644458/A_Theory_of_Gerontocracy_in_the_African_Customary_Law) on 23 March 2026.

ment.<sup>25</sup> This shared leadership structure reinforces social cohesion and ensures that authority remains accountable to the community.

### *Religious Specialists, Diviners, and Spiritual Mediators*

An important figure among ATR leadership is the religious specialists functioning as mediators between the visible and invisible realms. Their responsibilities include conducting sacrifices, interpreting divine will, healing, and preserving sacred traditions. These roles often require long apprenticeships and spiritual initiation, reinforcing their authority as specialists in sacred knowledge.

Diviners and spiritual mediators occupy a unique leadership role, often functioning as consultants to both individuals and community leaders. Their authority is often charismatic, believed to be conferred through divine calling or ancestral selection. This form of leadership exemplifies a model grounded in spiritual insight and revelatory knowledge rather than institutional office alone.

Consider the following compilation of titles, people groups, countries, and functions of “shamanic” religious specialists across Sub-Saharan Africa:<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> A google inquiry of “authors providing specific examples of elder leadership in Africa” accessed on 21 March 2026 led to several interesting examples: Kwame Gyekye notes that African political systems are fundamentally consultative, emphasizing shared authority rather than autocratic rule [*Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 120–25]; Philip J. Igbafe [*Benin under British Administration* (London: Longman, 1979), 45–47] notes that among the Edo people of Nigeria, the *Odionwere* serves as the senior-most elder, preserving tradition and mediating conflicts within the community; Victor C. Uchendu [*The Igbo of Southeast Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 40–44] notes that for the Igbo—being a stateless society—no single individual holds absolute authority; instead, governance is distributed across councils, age grades, and lineage heads.

<sup>26</sup> For a complete explanation of this how this table was generated and some of the unique descriptions, see the notes given on page 212.

| Title                    | People Group / Region    | Country / Area                  | Primary Functions                                                                                                  | Key Sources                                                                                    |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Babaláwo</b>          | Yoruba                   | Nigeria, Benin, Togo            | Ifá divination, interpretation of sacred corpus, ritual prescription, mediation between humans and deities (òriṣà) | John S. Mbiti, <i>African Religions and Philosophy</i> ; William Bascom, <i>Ifa Divination</i> |
| <b>Bokonon (Bokɔnon)</b> | Fon                      | Benin                           | Divination within Vodun system, spiritual diagnosis, ritual mediation                                              | Melville J. Herskovits, <i>Dahomey</i>                                                         |
| <b>Mallam</b>            | Hausa, Fulani            | Northern Nigeria, Niger, Ghana  | Islamic scholar, healer, amulet preparation, Qur'anic divination                                                   | Murray Last, <i>The Sokoto Caliphate</i>                                                       |
| <b>Komo Priest</b>       | Bambara                  | Mali                            | Custodian of esoteric knowledge, protection rituals, judicial-spiritual authority                                  | Dominique Zahan, <i>The Religion, Spirituality, and Thought of Traditional Africa</i>          |
| <b>Nganga</b>            | Kongo                    | DRC, Angola, Congo              | Healing, spirit mediation, use of power objects (nkisi), protection                                                | John M. Janzen, <i>Ngoma</i>                                                                   |
| <b>Laibon (Oloiboni)</b> | Maasai                   | Kenya, Tanzania                 | Prophet, ritual leader, healer, political advisor                                                                  | T. O. Beidelman, <i>The Cool Knife</i>                                                         |
| <b>Mganga</b>            | Swahili-speaking peoples | Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique     | Herbalist, healer, spirit exorcism, divination                                                                     | David Parkin, <i>Sacred Void</i>                                                               |
| <b>Sangoma</b>           | Zulu                     | South Africa, Eswatini          | Divination, ancestor communication, ritual healing, diagnosis of misfortune                                        | Harriet Ngubane, <i>Body and Mind in Zulu Medicine</i>                                         |
| <b>Inyanga</b>           | Zulu, Xhosa, Ndebele     | South Africa, Zimbabwe          | Herbal medicine, preparation of remedies, protective charms                                                        | Axel-Ivar Berglund, <i>Zulu Thought-Patterns and Symbolism</i>                                 |
| <b>N'anga</b>            | Shona                    | Zimbabwe, Mozambique            | Healing, divination, anti-witchcraft protection, ritual leadership                                                 | Michael Gelfand, <i>Shona Religion</i>                                                         |
| <b>Ngaka</b>             | Sotho-Tswana             | South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho | Divination, healing, mediation with ancestors                                                                      | John S. Mbiti, <i>African Religions and Philosophy</i>                                         |
| <b>Qallu</b>             | Oromo                    | Ethiopia                        | Ritual leadership, blessing, fertility rites, mediation in the Gadaa system                                        | Asmarom Legesse, <i>Gada</i>                                                                   |
| <b>Wadaad / Sheikh</b>   | Somali                   | Somalia, Ethiopia               | Islamic healing, blessings, spiritual mediation, scriptural authority                                              | Ioan M. Lewis, <i>Saints and Somalis</i>                                                       |

Figure 4: "Ritual Specialists" in sub-Saharan Africa

### *Ancestral Authority*

As mentioned above, a distinctive feature of ATR leadership is the role of ancestors as ongoing participants in governance. “Spiritual intercession from ancestors and deities is sought for a wide range of events, including, but not limited to: births, marriages and funerals; the appointment of a new chief; the building of a new home or compound; political or military success; protection against witchcraft; a safe journey; and, perhaps most importantly, the planting or harvesting of a season’s agricultural produce.”<sup>27</sup> Ancestors are believed to remain active members of a community ensuring stability by providing guidance for, confirming decisions of, and blessing or disciplining members of the community; therefore, leadership is accountable not only to the living but also to the “living-dead.”<sup>28</sup> Leadership, therefore, operates within a three-way relational framework involving the living, the ancestors, and the spiritual world creating a “transcendent” accountability. A focal point of this relationship in many cultures is a local shrine. As Sibani and Jaja note:<sup>29</sup>

In West Africa, shrines are more than just spiritual vessels or points of worship, they are powerful symbols of ethnic solidarity, group cohesion, knowledge about the landscape and a place of justice...shrines are vessels, they can act as contain-

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<sup>27</sup> Clifford Meesua Sibani and Jones M. Jaja, “Oath-Taking: A Religio-Cultural Pathway to Justice in West African Traditional Society,” *Global Journal of Arts and Social Management Sciences*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2025), p. 2. Accessed online at: [https://www.academia.edu/128501677/OATH\\_TAKING\\_A\\_RELIGIO-CULTURAL\\_PATHWAY\\_TO\\_JUSTICE\\_IN\\_WEST\\_AFRICAN\\_TRADITIONAL\\_SOCIETY](https://www.academia.edu/128501677/OATH_TAKING_A_RELIGIO-CULTURAL_PATHWAY_TO_JUSTICE_IN_WEST_AFRICAN_TRADITIONAL_SOCIETY) on 22 March 2026.

<sup>28</sup> Mbiti, pp. 82-83.

<sup>29</sup> Sibani and Jaja, p.7. Regarding the oversight of such shrines, they go on to note: “The chief priest is the custodian of the indigenous shrine and the link between the people and the deities, and he or she oversees the oath-taking which is usually done in the presence of the deity, while the deity acts as both the witness and the executor of the terms of the oath, to justify the truth or punish the one telling lies. Africans believe that oath-taking consists of external and internal actions; the external action is the physical ones performed when carrying out the ritual and it is what the observers see but the deity sees both the external and internal dynamics.”, p. 8.

ers in a literal sense for the spirits of ancestors and deities who must be regularly placated and petitioned for blessings, requests for intercession, justice and divine sanction. The spirits or deities must be venerated and sacrifices offered.

A leader in some societies, therefore, might be required to swear oaths before ancestral shrines, reinforcing understanding of the spiritual influence in community.<sup>30</sup>

## Leadership Styles in ATR

Having completed a survey of the primary leadership structures that can be identified among most ATR adherents, one can identify the normal leadership styles that emerge from these structures. Four principles can be noted readily. First, ATR are *communal and participatory* in nature regarding style of leadership. The multi-tiered leadership structures identified in the previous section tend to function best in a style emphasizing collective decision-making and shared responsibility. Authority is most often, then, exercised through consultation rather than coercion. This model aligns with African communal values and contrasts with highly centralized or individualistic leadership systems. Mbiti has famously characterized African communal identity in the quote: “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.”<sup>31</sup> A second style of leadership that naturally emerges from ATR leadership structures is an elder-oriented or “gerontocratic”<sup>32</sup> leadership as elders often hold authority due to age and experience. In such cases, age is associated

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<sup>30</sup> See Tsekpoe for an examination of the public oath-taking ceremonies in Ghanaian culture.

<sup>31</sup> Mbiti, p. 106.

<sup>32</sup> Gerontocracy/Gerontocratic refers to “government or control (as of a nation or organization) by people who are old” Meriam-Webster Online Dictionary, accessed at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gerontocratic> on 23 March 2026. Onyoyo would argue against equating “elder” to “old”: “Elder has the connotation of leadership, social status, merit, and wisdom, other than the old age in the ancient civilizations. Old age is not the measure to determine if one is an elder or not. Gerontocracy in this sense gives the concept of wisdom associated with kings, rulers and leaders.” (p. 2).

with wisdom, moral maturity, and closeness to ancestors.<sup>33</sup> This structure ensures continuity of tradition but may limit the participation of younger members.<sup>34</sup> A third dynamic of ATR leadership style which reflects the multi-tiered leadership structure is a focus on spiritual and mediatory leadership. The nature of leadership is expected to function as the bridge between the spiritual realm and the lived human experience. As religious leaders often derive legitimacy in the community based upon their role as intermediaries of divine power, the style of leadership often engages with some form of demonstration of this connection from competency in rituals to spiritual insights. This dynamic can result in misuse or abuse of power.<sup>35</sup> This mediatory role distinguishes ATR leadership from other administration and secular leadership models. A final facet of the style of leadership dominant among ATR is a pattern of decision-making that is typically consensus-based. As mentioned above, leadership structures prioritize communal harmony and unity. Conflict resolution, therefore, tends to prioritize restoration rather than punishment, aiming to reintegrate individuals into the community. This practice reflects a holistic understanding of justice, where spiritual, social, and moral dimensions are interconnected. Sibani and Jaja connect the solemnness of the public oath-taking of leaders with a commitment to providing justice from personal relationships (such as accusations of infidelity) to community relationships

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<sup>33</sup> Mbiti addresses the understanding that respect for elders is deeply embedded in African ontology and social organization, pp. 108-110.

<sup>34</sup> While ‘elder’ rule within communal life and religious life is broadly welcomed, some challenge has emerged in the establishment of “a culture that excluded Africa’s youth from active participation in politics” [Joseph Olusegun Adebayo, “Gerontocracy in African Politics: Youth and the Quest for Political Participation” *Journal of African Elections*, Vol. 17, No. 1, June 2018, pp. 140-161], p. 140. Downloaded: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326416615\\_Gerontocracy\\_in\\_African\\_Politics\\_Youth\\_and\\_the\\_Quest\\_for\\_Political\\_Participation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326416615_Gerontocracy_in_African_Politics_Youth_and_the_Quest_for_Political_Participation) on 23 March 2026.

<sup>35</sup> For an excellent examination of some of the problems of this spiritual dynamic of leadership, see Kimion Tagwirei, “(Mis)leading by the spirit: Transforming African spiritualities and political leadership” in *Verbum et Ecclesia* Vol. 44, No. 1, Pretoria 2023. Online version downloaded on 23 March 2026 at: <https://verbumetecclisia.org.za/index.php/ve/article/view/2934/6874>.

(such as criminal activity) to national interests (such as peace-keeping initiatives) to the installation of leaders.<sup>36</sup>

## **Baptist and ATR Leadership Models**

Although ATR and biblical theology have great differences, some structural parallels can be noted. As one engages with ATR, one should be aware of these “bridges” and “barriers” to understanding.

### *Bridges for engagement*

Several points of similar understanding should be recognizable. First, the role of elders in leading community is affirmed both in the Old Testament (see Ex. 18:13-26) and the New Testament (see Titus 1: 5-9). Second, both Baptists and ATR affirm the role of the community in discerning truth and making decisions (see Acts 6:1-7; 15:1-29). One should note that while both value community participation, Baptists formalize the manner of participation through congregational polity. A third area of similarity is the expectation of high character of leaders (see 1 Tim 3:1-13). Finally, both the church and ATR are viewed within their communities as resources for reconciliation and unification within a community. These points of common understanding of leadership provide a starting point for intentional engagement.

### *Barriers to engagement*

While one can find many starting points of common understanding, one should also be very aware of critical distinctions that must be understood to avoid misinterpretation of leadership goals for ATR. The similar sounding terminology can lead to syncretism of beliefs if one is not watchful. The Christian must maintain the uniqueness of God (see Dt. 6:4). Similarly, the divinity of Jesus and the efficacy of the work of Jesus cannot be compromised. Contrary to any mediatory role assigned to ancestors, Scripture clearly declares there is only one mediator between God and humanity—Christ Jesus (see 1 Tim 2:5). Furthermore, as a mediator, Jesus is completely sufficient and there is no need for any additional mediator. The source of authority is a third distinction that can create barriers to gospel engagement. While authority tends to

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<sup>36</sup> Sibani and Jaja, pp. 22-26.

reside in tradition among ATR, Scripture is the authority upon which leadership structures and styles are based. Further, ATR can move to authoritative hierarchy based upon age or lineage instead of calling, character, competency, and compatibility. For Baptists, leadership is usually elected and is understood in covenantal terms. Finally, from a more practical aspect, ATR tend to be limited in an ability to organize for a formal large-scale structure. This reality creates difficulty in engaging beyond a limited scope at any given time.

### *Conclusions*

In summary, ATR identifies tradition and ancestors as source of **authority**; communal network as the given **leadership structure**; consultative and restorative as a primary descriptor of **leadership style**; and find **accountability** in the community and ancestors. For church administration in Africa, ATR provides valuable insights into communal leadership and participatory governance, while also presenting theological challenges that require careful discernment. A contextualized Christian leadership model must engage these traditions critically and constructively, affirming what aligns with biblical principles while remaining faithful to the authority of Scripture.

## NEO-PENTECOSTALISM<sup>37</sup>/PROSPERITY GOSPEL

While Pentecostalism emerged in Africa over a century ago, in the last fifty years, a newer form characterized by an emphasis on material prosperity—referred to here as “Neo-Pentecostalism” to distinguish it from classic Pentecostalism—has rapidly moved across sub-Saharan Africa. The rapid expansion of prosperity-oriented Pentecostal and Charismatic churches across sub-Saharan Africa represents one of the most significant developments in contemporary African Christianity.<sup>38</sup> Often referred to as the “prosperity gospel,” this movement emphasizes divine blessing manifested in material wealth, physical health, and social success.<sup>39</sup> The Lausanne Theology Working Group succinctly defines the Prosperity Gospel as “The teaching that believers have a right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the ‘sowing of seeds’ through the faithful payments of tithes and offerings.”<sup>40</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu states it more forcibly in terms of the promise of “Victory...over sin, sickness,

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<sup>37</sup> For an excellent exploration of the history and impact of the Pentecostal movement in Africa and its development into a prosperity focused theology in “Neo-Pentecostalism” see Randy Arnett, *Pentecostalization: The Evolution of Baptists in Africa* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform; 1st edition, May 4, 2017).

<sup>38</sup> Obu Kalu states that African Pentecostalism is “one of the most significant religious forces in the contemporary world” *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> For a more recent investigation into the Prosperity Gospel movement see Sampson M. Nwaomah, “Overview of Prosperity Gospel,” in *Prosperity Gospel: A Biblical-Theological Evaluation* (Accra: Advent Press, 2020) who explains that “Prosperity gospel teaches that faith...brings material and physical blessings.” (pp. 3-4).

<sup>40</sup> Lausanne Movement, *A Statement on the Prosperity Gospel* (Theology Working Group, 2010). Available at: <https://lausanne.org/content/a-statement-on-the-prosperity-gospel>. Kate Bowler *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 7, defines “prosperity gospel” as “a belief that God grants health and wealth to those with the right kind of faith.” She traces diverse theological strands ranging from Pentecostals, Holiness Evangelicalism, American Methodism, African-American Baptism or Dutch Reformed Calvinism melded into American Prosperity Gospel. She goes on to explain a foundational belief within the movement as “Faith... unleashes spiritual forces... wealth and health demonstrate the success of faith.” (Ibid.).

curses, poverty and setbacks.”<sup>41</sup> In African contexts, marked by economic uncertainty, large-scale unemployment, and social instability, prosperity churches connect to a large population as they offer not only theological explanations for suffering but also a promise of empowerment to overcome suffering and upward mobility—a combination that Williams characterizes as fostering self-centeredness and greed.<sup>42</sup> Leadership within these churches is therefore not merely ecclesiastical but socio-economic, symbolic, and charismatic in nature.

### **Theological Foundations of Leadership for Neo-Pentecostals**

In considering a primary theological connection (and development) between Neo-Pentecostalism and ATR, Rodgers writes:<sup>43</sup>

Neo-Pentecostalism engages the African worldview by recognizing the daily struggles and dangers wrought by spiritual forces and responds to this struggle by emphasizing God’s intervention. ATR treats these forces as powers to be appeased and pacified. Unfortunately, mainline churches, prior to the charismatic movement, discounted this spiritual reality. In contrast, Neo-Pentecostalism engages reality by claiming God’s presence and incursion into the cosmic struggle.

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<sup>41</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Pentecostalism in Africa,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, ed. Erwin Fahlbusch et al. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 349.

<sup>42</sup> Dodeye U. Williams, “Prosperity Theology: Poverty and Implications for Socio-Economic Development in Africa,” *HTS Teologiese Studies* 78, no. 1 (2022), p. 1. The purpose of his article as stated in the abstract is to challenge “the theology of prosperity that characterizes Pentecostal Christianity and is pervasive in Africa. It contributes to the discourse on how the challenges of poverty require the more community-centered approaches that traditional African values offer as against the self-centredness and greed promoted by the prosperity theology.”

<sup>43</sup> Rodgers, *Introduction*, pp. 55-56.

Rodgers identifies four essential theological pillars of Neo-Pentecostalism:<sup>44</sup>

- *Charismatic Gifts*: “the personal experience with God holds a prominent place in Neo-Pentecostal belief. This experience is closely tied to Spirit baptism by which the individual believer receives the charismatic gifts. These gifts manifest the changed relationship with God. In this respect, Spirit baptism is a marker for Neo-Pentecostal identity.”<sup>45</sup>
- *Salvation*: “salvation is an essential component of Neo-Pentecostal faith and practice. Well-being for today constitutes the main emphasis of salvation. Hence, salvation is understood primarily as freedom from power-induced problems, such as sickness, poverty, misfortune, affliction, fear, and disrupted relationships.”<sup>46</sup>
- *Special People of God*: “Their view of salvation distinguishes them from other groups. Consistently, the Neo-Pentecostal movement has insisted on two separate components. For one, the believer is regenerated and sanctified. For two, Spirit baptism provides the external marker of the internal change, thereby setting the believer apart. In this way, Neo-Pentecostal believers are distinct from other Christians...Neo-Pentecostals establish their uniqueness through a warfare worldview that views the cosmos in dual-

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 55-59.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 56

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 57. Rodgers provides an interesting comparison between ATR, Mainline Christianity, and Neo-Pentecostalism on this theological perspective: “At this point, the significant differences between ATR and the mainline churches become apparent. ATR seeks to appease and manipulate the powers to bring healing and provide protection. The mainline churches offer a heavenly salvation for the future, and community development projects, and medical care for the present. Neo-Pentecostalism promotes a present, immediate salvation of abundance and well-being by vanquishing the spirits.” (Ibid.) See also Ronnie Davis and Kennedy Mulenga’s discussion of the understanding of redemption in Neo-Pentecostalism in *Introduction to Biblical Theology Africa Theology Series* (Niamey, Niger: SOLA printing, 2022), pp. 155-161.

istic terms. They consider the world divided into two parts—Satan and his people who oppose God and his people.”<sup>47</sup>

- *Bible*: “While various Neo-Pentecostal groups recognize the Bible, its authority varies. In Africa, Neo-Pentecostals... employ a reader-centered hermeneutic that allows them to interpret freely based on the reader’s immediate perspective and experience... while the Bible is recognized as the authority, it is not the final revelation. God continues to speak. Both revelation and theology continue to develop as pastors, prophets, and apostles speak under inspiration.”<sup>48</sup>

Prosperity Gospel adherents find support through citing of Scripture to justify their positions. Some more frequently cited passages include:

- *Faith and Declaration*: Mark 11:23-24 (“I assure you: If anyone says to this mountain ‘Be lifted up and thrown into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him. Therefore, I tell you all the things you pray and ask for—believe that you have received them and you will have them.”)
- *Reciprocal Giving*: Luke 6:8 (“Give and it will be given to you; a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over—will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.”)
- *Sowing and Reaping*: 2 Corinthians 9:6 (“Remember this: the person who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the person who sows generously will also reap generously.”)

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 58. Rodgers once again provides an insightful comparison: This warfare worldview stands in sharp contrast to that of ATR and the AICs [African Independent Churches], where they largely give in to the power of the spirit world. It differs, also, from that of the mainline churches that often dismiss the spirit world as superstitious or primitive. The genius of Neo-Pentecostalism lies in its acceptance of the cultural understanding of the spirit world while urging Neo-Pentecostal followers to wage war against the spirits.” (Ibid.).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., pp. 58.

- *Holistic Prosperity*: 3 John 2 (“Dear friend, I pray that you may prosper in every way and be in good health, just as your soul prospers.”)

This theological orientation positions the leader as a *mediator* of divine blessing, a “spirit power person”—often titled “apostle,” “bishop,” or “prophet”—whose authority is believed to be “proven” by their own visible material success. Leadership authority is therefore not in institutional accountability but in perceived spiritual gifting and divine calling.

## **Organizational and Leadership Structures among Neo-Pentecostals**

### *Founder-Centered Charismatic Authority*

The dominant leadership model in prosperity churches is founder-centered as the church is often structured around “the authority of a founding figure whose personal charisma defines the movement.”<sup>49</sup> In African prosperity churches, this charisma is demonstrated through supposed healing, prophecy, and testimonies of success with legitimacy, therefore, deriving from perceived supernatural gifting rather than institutional office. Leaders in these movements function simultaneously as spiritual authorities and organizational heads, combining roles of CEO, spiritual authority, primary preacher, and vision-caster. Heuser’s research on African megachurches demonstrates that such structures are highly centralized, with decision-making authority vested almost exclusively in the founder or their immediate family.<sup>50</sup>

A topic of interest in organizations functioning with the principle of founder-centered authority is the question of succession. In many such prosperity churches, leadership succession often follows familial lines, with spouses or children assuming leadership roles.<sup>51</sup> This dynas-

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<sup>49</sup> Asonzeh Ukah, *A New Paradigm of Pentecostal Power* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2008), p. 45.

<sup>50</sup> Andreas Heuser, “Charting African Prosperity Gospel Economies,” *HTS Teologiese Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016). Downloaded at <https://hts.org.za/index.php/HTS/article/view/3823> on 23 March 2026.

<sup>51</sup> See Ukah for further discussion around succession.

tic pattern reinforces continuity but raises concerns about accountability and calling.

### *“Apostolic” Networks*

Prosperity churches frequently operate through apostolic networks that extend across national boundaries. Adogame notes, “African Pentecostal churches have developed extensive transnational networks that link local congregations to global religious organizations.”<sup>52</sup> Through these networks, churches create a connection to a larger movement with more resources which reinforces centralized authority while enabling rapid expansion—almost like a “franchise” system in corporate structures. In this case, the global center provides doctrinal and administrative control. There is always a clear “hierarchy” of authority.

### *Corporate Leadership Models*

Prosperity churches often adopt corporate practices in terms of administration models. Heuser describes them as “religious economies in which spiritual goods are produced, marketed, and consumed.”<sup>53</sup> This model includes such corporate elements as branding and media outreach; structured financial systems—usually focused on soliciting tithes or “seed offerings”; and leadership training institutions.

## **Leadership Styles among Neo-Pentecostals**

Having surveyed the common leadership structures identified among Prosperity Gospel churches, one needs to consider the way those structures are implemented in the local churches. Four dynamics of leadership style can be readily identified. The most common style of leadership is not surprising: an authoritative charismatic driven approach. Since the structure is most often founder-centered, the style of leadership most notably is set by the practices of that founder. The patterns

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<sup>52</sup> Afe Adogame, “The African Christian Diaspora,” in *The Routledge Companion to Christianity in Africa*, ed. Elias K. Bongmba (New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 462. See also his book, *The African Christian Diaspora: New Currents and Emerging Trends in World Christianity* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> Heuser, p. 5. He goes on to describe these churches as religious enterprises, where leaders act as “economic missionaries” employing marketing strategies to mobilize resources.

established by the founder are the patterns most likely to continue: “Pentecostal leadership is often highly personalized, revolving around the vision and authority of the founder.”<sup>54</sup> Such leadership style places a high value on loyalty and obedience with the guiding principles the application of the leader’s vision—which, in turn, usually reflects the founder’s vision. The leadership can often be described as personalized even though it is very authoritative—the leader seems to speak directly to the congregant. The combination of a strong “vision” for the direction of the church and the high emphasis on loyalty to the leader usually results in a very limited participation by the congregation in any form of church governance. Further, the leader’s word is often equated with Scripture as Rodgers warns, “In practice, a word from a prophet today holds more power and appeal than an antiquated word from God in the Bible.”<sup>55</sup> A second aspect of leadership styles within Neo-Pentecostal/Prosperity Gospel churches that derives from the leadership structures is a strong emphasis on “performance” and media usage. Kalu rightly notes that “the use of media technologies has become central to the expansion of Pentecostal influence.”<sup>56</sup> Consistent use of media—with an emphasis on quality—expands the leader’s influence beyond the immediate congregation. While radio, television, and social media<sup>57</sup> are important parts of media strategy, large crusades—often broadcasted in some form and re-formatted for social reels and videos—are still a critical part of maintaining influence. A final aspect of Prosperity Gospel church leadership style to consider is that it reflects a “therapeutic” and motivational leadership emphasis. Often-times, the leader seems more like a “life coach” who addresses personal chal-

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<sup>54</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *Contemporary Pentecostal Christianity* (Oxford: Regnum, 2013), p. 73.

<sup>55</sup> Rodgers, *Introduction*, p. 59.

<sup>56</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 3.

<sup>57</sup> Facebook and YouTube are still the most engaged platforms with Instagram, WhatsApp, and Tik-Tok rounding out the top 5. A staggering 500 hours of video were uploaded to YouTube every minute across all contributors, Jack Shepherd, “23 Essential YouTube Statistics You Need to Know in 2026,” *Social Shepherd* webpage, 23 March 2026 accessed at <https://thesocialshepherd.com/blog/youtube-statistics> on 24 March 2026.

lenges while giving a motivational talk than proclaiming the Gospel.<sup>58</sup> One should note that they capture attention because they often address genuine anxieties that arise from living in rapidly urbanizing African societies. Bowler provides an accurate assessment when she concludes that “prosperity preachers offered a gospel of uplift, promising personal transformation and success.”<sup>59</sup>

## **Administrative and Financial Systems**

In addition to considering leadership structures and leadership styles among Neo-Pentecostals, one needs to note the use of administration in the development of financial systems among Prosperity Gospel churches. A critical development among these churches is the ability to frame giving as a “ritual” act of faith. Heuser explains: “Giving is framed as an investment that yields spiritual and material returns.”<sup>60</sup> The continued emphasis on not only tithing, but also the sowing of “seed faith” places responsibility upon the congregation for the full experience of God’s plan in their lives. As salvation is often more about being saved from circumstances than sin,<sup>61</sup> one’s act of faith in financial giving is often seen as the only fool-proof strategy for acquiring the fullness of salvation here and now.

Several issues can be noted in such practice. First, is that it can minimize the efficacy of the saving work of Jesus. The shift in focus for one’s circumstances now as the defining factor of the impact of salvation can lead some to misunderstand the nature of salvation. A second area of concern is maintaining proper transparency in the han-

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<sup>58</sup> Even the titles of such “sermons” capture this emphasis. A quick google search of one famous Prosperity preacher’s sermon titles uncovers such topics as “Seeing Yourself the Way You Want to Be”; “Living Break-Through Minded”; “Having a Good Opinion of Yourself”; “Living Life Happy”; “Shame Off You”; “Your Set Time for Favor” just to name a few. Accessed at: <https://thetvdb.com/series/joel-osteen/allseasons/official> on 24 March 2026.

<sup>59</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, p.89.

<sup>60</sup> Heuser, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> See Davis and Mulenga, pp. 157-158. They note this perspective of salvation for comfort, “...Christians can live a good life of spiritual and material abundance this side of heaven as a *chief end*... If this state of wellbeing does not happen in one’s life, then they do not have enough faith for breakthroughs or they need deliverance from hindering elements...” (Ibid.).

dling and use of money since finances are often controlled by centralized leadership structures and limited public accountability.<sup>62</sup>

### **Baptists and Neo-Pentecostal/Prosperity Gospel Leadership**

One finds in the patterns of leadership structures and styles among Prosperity Gospel proponents the realization that leadership models are shaped not only by theology but also by socio-economic realities. Widespread poverty and unemployment partnered with a worldview that reflects a strong belief in “spiritual causality” provides fertile ground for the growth of Neo-Pentecostalism. Prosperity Gospel experiences rapid expansion because of the foundation of ATR as prosperity theology resonates with African worldviews that link spiritual forces to material realities, while simultaneously offering a modern vision of success.<sup>63</sup> Williams contends that prosperity theology in Africa tends to displace the communal and relational values central to ATR—such as social responsibility, family cohesion, and mutual accountability—by promoting a more individualistic and materialistic pursuit of wealth and success.<sup>64</sup>

#### *Bridges for Engagement with Neo-Pentecostalism*

One can note some strengths to the leadership structure and style of Prosperity adherents that can provide a point of contact for Baptists to

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<sup>62</sup> While prosperity preachers in the American context have frequently been implicated in financial scandals, only a small number have faced criminal *conviction* specifically for tax evasion (i.e., Kent Hovind, 2006; Tony Alamo, 2009). Most legal cases instead involve fraud (or misrepresentation), conspiracy, or regulatory violations (i.e., improper use of tax-exempt status or failure to report income), reflecting both the complexity of religious tax law and the limited enforcement of financial accountability in religious organizations. In the African context, high-profile occurrences have faced charges (not yet convictions) of fraud, money laundering (luxury asset accumulation, i.e., jet and properties), and immigration violations (fraudulent permits) across the continent.

<sup>63</sup> See Dodeye U. Williams, “Prosperity Theology”: Poverty and Implications for Socio-Economic Development in Africa,” HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies 78, no. 1 (2022) for a more complete consideration (Downloaded at <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i1.7818> on 24 March 2026) and Matthews A. Ojo, “The Prosperity Gospel among Neo-Pentecostals in Africa” in *The Abandoned Gospel: Confronting Neo-Pentecostalism and the Prosperity Gospel in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Malawi: AB316, 2021), pp. 29–40 for an examination of the growth and development in Africa.

<sup>64</sup> Williams, pp. 5–7.

engage them in gospel conversation. The greatest strength is the contextual relevance in the sense that they are aware of the existential realities of overwhelming poverty—and the nature of the fears and aspirations that result from such a reality. A second strength is the ability to encourage and empower members resulting in widespread mobilization. The organizational dynamic of such churches is often quite effective. As points of bridges, Baptists must also relate to the lived experience of the community but proclaim the hope of the gospel clearly and faithfully.

### *Barriers to Engagement*

While strengths exist, clear problems can also be noted. The emphasis on the material both in the message and the structural goals is concerning. Further, the lack of transparency compounds the problem. Most problematic, however, is the tendency toward theological claims of financial giving as a means of experiencing a fulness of salvation. The understanding of salvation and the completeness of the saving work of Jesus must be engaged as there is a clear disconnect to what “salvation” means to Neo-Pentecostals and what Scripture teaches. The “emphasis on wealth risks overshadowing other dimensions of Christian discipleship.”<sup>65</sup>

### *Conclusions*

In summary, Neo-Pentecostals/Prosperity Church identifies **authority** with charisma and revelation; has a **structure** that is a centralized hierarchy; resulting in a **leadership style** that is visionary and directive; and **accountability** is leader centered. On the surface, there does not seem to be much hope or reason for any adaptations of prosperity leadership models in the African church. Some lessons, however, can be gleaned for church administration in African contexts considering the many pitfalls of this leadership style and structure. Such as a reminder of a strong need for accountability within the community; a need to balance charismatic authority with solid congregational governance; a need for good theological training; and a greater importance on character over charisma.

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<sup>65</sup> Bowler, *Blessed*, p. 221.

## ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH (RCC)

The leadership structures of the Roman Catholic Church are rooted in a theological vision of the Church as both a visible institution and a spiritual communion. The Church structure, therefore, is not merely organizational but grounded in the belief that Christ instituted offices of leadership for teaching, sanctifying, and governing the faithful.<sup>66</sup> The structure is understood as originating with Christ for the purpose of salvation for the “People of God”:<sup>67</sup>

In order to shepherd the People of God and to increase its numbers without cease, Christ the Lord set up in his Church a variety of offices which aim at the good of the whole body. The holders of office, who are invested with a sacred power, are, in fact, dedicated to promoting the interests of their brethren, so that all who belong to the People of God. . . may attain to salvation.

Leadership in the Catholic Church, therefore, is not democratic in origin but *sacramental* and hierarchical, rooted in divine mandate. The Second Vatican Council’s Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), is viewed as the authoritative articulation of Catholic leadership. In the third chapter, it seeks to explain the complex reality of the Church as both visible and spiritual, both hierarchical in structure made alive and empowered by the Spirit.<sup>68</sup>

Central to Catholic leadership structure is the doctrine of apostolic succession—that the church is governed by the direct successor of

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<sup>66</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) online. Downloaded from the Vatican archives online at: Catechism of the Catholic Church [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM) on 10 Nov 2021, sections 873-875.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., section 874.

<sup>68</sup> Chapter III: “On The Hierarchical Structure of the Church and in Particular on the Episcopate” in Second Vatican Council (Promulgated by Pope Paul VI), *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), November 21, 1964, Sections 18-29, Accessed on 24 March 2026 from Vatican website, [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html).

Peter<sup>69</sup> together with the bishops; thus, ensuring a continuity in doctrinal fidelity and institutional unity across time and geography. There is a “sameness” to local Catholic church—from doctrine to leadership structures and styles—wherever encountered, precisely because of this understanding of divine succession.

The understanding of succession is critical to the relationship between the clergy, the laity, and the church. According to the *Lumen Gentium*, the apostles are set apart as a type of ‘college’ (“Lord Jesus, after praying to the Father, calling to Himself those whom He desired, appointed twelve to be with Him, and whom He would send to preach the Kingdom of God; and these apostles He formed after the manner of a college or a stable group, over which He placed Peter chosen from among them”<sup>70</sup>) empowering them by the Spirit to teach and shepherd the people of God.<sup>71</sup> These functions, by means of apostolic succession, continue in the bishops: “Bishops, therefore, with their helpers, the priests and deacons, have taken up the service of the community, presiding in place of God over the flock, whose shepherds they are, as teachers for doctrine, priests for sacred worship, and ministers for governing.”<sup>72</sup> This succession is not viewed as symbolic by the Catholic church but real and sacramental, ensuring the continuation of both doctrine and mission. According to RCC understanding, authority—and the leadership structures through which it is exercised—is, therefore, derived not from the congregation but from Christ through apostolic transmission.

## **RCC and Traditional African Culture**

The RCC has moved throughout the continent of Africa. Many early priests and missionaries engaged with people and their needs well. They travelled to remote places, learned languages, and sought to minister to the African people. In many areas, the RCC became known for establishing hospitals and schools. Not only involved in the building, but also in the staffing through priests and nuns.<sup>73</sup> Additionally, the

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., Section 8.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Section 19.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., Sections 19-20.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., Section 20.

<sup>73</sup> Rodgers, Introduction, p. 41.

RCC has been intentional in engaging with those in need or the marginalized through such programmes as feeding the poor, healing the sick, and aiding in community development. In South Africa, the RCC developed a reputation for defying Apartheid laws in its ministry throughout the country. While such actions provided openings for the RCC to expand throughout the continent, one also realizes that a high level of syncretism<sup>74</sup> has taken place because RCC theology and practice often intersects with African culture and Traditional Religion in a way that makes it particularly appealing.<sup>75</sup> Rodgers accurately identified five areas where RCC theology and ATR worldview have strong common ground resulting in opportunities for syncretism:<sup>76</sup>

- *Ancestors and Mediators*:<sup>77</sup> The role of ancestors within African cultures is important [see the discussion above in connection to ATR] as “There is a veneration of ancestors in Africa and a desire to appeal to them to mediate between God and man to solve everyday problems of life... This propensity in African culture to use a go-between is one of the things that makes the RCC so appealing to Africans. They already venerate people who have passed away, and they appeal to them for help. Now the RCC offers a “Christian” version of this where they can appeal to dead Christian heroes of the faith to be mediators between them and God.”<sup>78</sup>
- *Purgatory*:<sup>79</sup> “It is easy to see the appeal of this doctrine to the ATR mind. African Traditional Religion is built around the con-

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<sup>74</sup> Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines “syncretism” as “the combination of different forms of belief or practice”. The site also provides an interesting story around an early use of the word: “The ancient Greeks used the term *synkretismos* to refer to Cretan cities allied in opposition to a common enemy.” Accessed at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/syncretism> on 25 March 2026.

<sup>75</sup> Rodgers. p. 41.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-48.

<sup>77</sup> For a discussion on the role of mediators in RCC, see Davis and Mulenga, *Biblical Theology*, pp. 164-166.

<sup>78</sup> Rodgers., pp. 42-43.

<sup>79</sup> For an excellent discussion of the RCC doctrine of Purgatory, see Davis and Mulenga, pp. 204-207.

cepts of the living dead who are not in heaven or hell but are somehow stuck in this world and continue to interact with humanity... While the RCC doctrine of purgatory might not be biblical, it is surely appealing to ATR which already has a similar concept in its cosmology.”<sup>80</sup>

- *Works Based Religion*: Another appealing aspect of the RCC to African culture is its emphasis on salvation by works instead of by grace alone... This works-based thinking, (or rewards versus punishment), meshes well with the RCC perspective on Christianity...with many rules and protocols to be observed...even salvation is dependent upon keeping the sacraments and not simply grace and faith alone.”<sup>81</sup>
- *Ritual and Cultic Practices*: “African traditional religion is often rife with various rituals and cultic practices. There are special places for special ceremonies and there are myriad rituals and protocols related to those ceremonies... [Africans] tend to respect rituals even more if they are highly elaborate. Elaborate would be one word to describe the religious process of the Roman Catholic Church... The mass and religious services are often done in Latin and there is much ceremony where every motion, every gesture and every word are laden with meaning and history. Yet, the system is also very predictable and can be reproduced at any given church or cathedral around the world.”<sup>82</sup>
- *Veneration of the Church and the Institutional Emphasis*: “In the RCC the church is a combination of the priesthood, the buildings, the people, the sacraments, the history, and traditions. In short, it is an institution that is to be admired and supported. The RCC is very institutional and very concrete. Africans tend to prefer the concrete over the abstract... This makes the RCC very appealing in Sub-Saharan Africa because they are very visible with their

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<sup>80</sup> Rodgers, p. 44.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

buildings, the uniforms for the nuns, the collars for the priests, etc. You can see where the Catholic church is active and the bigger the institution, the more powerful and relevant it seems to the African mind...the RCC kingdom is a very visible one and that corresponds with the African culture that values what can be seen and what is concrete...”<sup>83</sup>

With the understanding of the common points of thought between the RCC and the African worldview, one can proceed to examine the leadership structures and styles of the RCC.

### **The Hierarchical Structure of the RCC**

Any consideration of leadership structures within the RCC immediately recognizes a strict and defined hierarchy that exists. As mentioned above, this structure is understood as initiated by Christ and has sacramental implications.

#### *The Papacy: Highest RCC Authority*

The Pope is regarded as the successor of the Apostle Peter and holds the office of “Vicar of Christ”.<sup>84</sup> The term vicar derives from the Latin *vicarius*, meaning “substitute; substituted; supplying the place of someone/something.”<sup>85</sup> In Catholic theology, therefore, the “Vicar of Christ” (*Vicarius Christi*) refers to one who exercises Christ’s authority in a representative capacity—not as a replacement for Christ, but as His servant and visible instrument. Hence, the title “Vicar of Christ” expresses the understanding that the authority is enacted “in the name of Christ.” In capacity of this office, “the Roman Pontiff has full, supreme and universal power over the Church. And he is always free to exercise this power.”<sup>86</sup> The primary areas of focus for the office of the pope are three-fold: Vicar of Christ (representative of Christ on Earth); Chief Shepherd of the global church (the “universal pastor”);

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-48.

<sup>84</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, Section 22.

<sup>85</sup> “vicarius-vicaria-vicarium” Latin Dictionary online accessed on 25 March 2026 at: <https://www.latindictionary.io/entry/vicarius-vicaria-vicarium>

<sup>86</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, Section 22.

and the *Magisterium*<sup>87</sup> (chief teacher of doctrine and charged to “teach the faithful the truth to believe, the charity to practice, the beatitude to hope for.”)<sup>88</sup> This singular, central figure of authority is “the perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity”<sup>89</sup> of the global church thus ensuring unity in doctrine and governance—and a defining characteristic of the RCC which distinguishes Catholic leadership from most other Church models. The Pope does not govern in isolation, however, but in relation to the “college of bishops,” reflecting a balance between central authority and collegiality.

### *The College of Bishops*

Bishops collectively form the “College of Bishops,” and, as mentioned above are understood to be successors of the apostles. As such, bishops are often seen as the primary bearers of RCC authority acting under the guidance of the Pope. The *Lumen Gentium* establishes the foundational position and activity of bishops:<sup>90</sup>

The individual bishops, who are placed in charge of particular churches, exercise their pastoral government over the portion of the People of God committed to their care, and not over other churches nor over the universal Church. But each of them, as a member of the episcopal college and

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<sup>87</sup> *Magisterium* is a Latin word referring to a “Master” in an academic sense or to the “office of superintendent/president/master/chief; instruction/control/governance” more broadly (Latin Dictionary online accessed at <https://www.latindictionary.io/dictionary?q=magisterium&lang=auto> on 25 March 2026).

<sup>88</sup> CCC, Section 2034. The pope is understood to oversee the college of bishops who would also provide teaching, but the chief responsibility lies with the pope who is the “Magisterium” of the RCC in the sense that he is the final authority regarding the teaching role of RCC leadership.

<sup>89</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, Section 23. The passage highlights a parallel role for bishops: “the individual bishops, however, are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches, fashioned after the model of the universal Church, in and from which churches come into being the one and only Catholic Church. For this reason, the individual bishops represent each his own church, but all of them together and with the Pope represent the entire Church in the bond of peace, love and unity.” (Ibid.)

<sup>90</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, Section 23.

legitimate successor of the apostles, is obliged by Christ's institution and command to be solicitous for the whole Church, and this solicitude, though it is not exercised by an act of jurisdiction, contributes greatly to the advantage of the universal Church. For it is the duty of all bishops to promote and to safeguard the unity of faith and the discipline common to the whole Church, to instruct the faithful to love for the whole mystical body of Christ, especially for its poor and sorrowing members and for those who are suffering persecution for justice's sake, and finally to promote every activity that is of interest to the whole Church, especially that the faith may take increase and the light of full truth appear to all men. And this also is important, that by governing well their own church as a portion of the universal Church, they themselves are effectively contributing to the welfare of the whole Mystical Body, which is also the body of the churches.

In practice, bishops exercise authority in three primary realms: "To those whom the Lord has called to be the Successors of the Apostles in the Church, i.e., the Bishops, Christ confers the three-fold office (*triplex munus*) of teaching, sanctifying and governing."<sup>91</sup> So that the Bishops can discharge "in notable and visible form the role of Christ as Teacher, Pontiff and Pastor."<sup>92</sup> More specifically, each "office" of the Bishop carries a specific authoritative function. Through the "Teaching Office" (*Munus Docendi*) they are understood to be "authentic teachers...endowed with the authority of Christ, who preach the faith to the people entrusted to them"<sup>93</sup> and to whom "divine assistance is given to the successors of the apostles...when they pro-

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<sup>91</sup> Synod of Bishops, "The Bishop: Servant of the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Hope of the World" *Lineamenta* (Vatican City: Ordinary General Assembly, 1998), Section 50. The document explains that Bishops "receive this three-fold office through episcopal ordination and exercise it in the person and name of Christ..." (Ibid.)

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> CCC, Section 888. For a more complete explanation of this role, see "The Bishop: Sent forth to Teach" in *Lineamenta*, Sections 52-59.

pose...teachings in matters of faith and morals.”<sup>94</sup> Through the “Sanctifying Office” (*Munus Sanctificandi*), the bishop “is ‘the steward of the grace of the supreme priesthood’ especially in the Eucharist which he offers personally or whose offering he assures through the priests, his co-workers... The bishop and priests sanctify the Church by their prayer and work, by their ministry of the word and of the sacraments.”<sup>95</sup> This belief highlights the understanding that bishops mediate grace and foster holiness within the Church through their oversight of the liturgical and sacramental life of the People of God. Finally, through the “Governing Office” (*Munus Regendi*) the bishops provide pastoral oversight for their dioceses: “The bishops, as vicars and legates of Christ, govern the particular Churches... by their counsels, exhortations, and example... and by their authority and sacred power.”<sup>96</sup> The role combines administrative focus with pastoral care as they are called to reflect Christ’s role as Shepherd of the Church.

RCC further teaches that these three functions are inseparable dimensions of one episcopal ministry: “The three-fold office of teaching, sanctifying and governing gives form to the mission of the Bishop and underlies all its daily activity. Just as in Christ the three functions are three distinct aspects of his single office as Mediator and three aspects of a single salvific activity, so also in the ministry of the Bishop they have to be considered as a unity.”<sup>97</sup> Thus, each function intersects with the others: teaching sanctifies and guides, sanctifying teaches and governs, and governing includes teaching and sanctifying. Each bishop governs a diocese, exercising ordinary authority within the church or churches which have been placed under his care; therefore, the “college of bishops” exercise roles and authority both in a broader sense (shared responsibility with other bishops and the Pope) and having local autonomy within the larger hierarchical unity. In Africa, this leadership structure often blends with cultural expectations of communal

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., Section 892.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., Section 893. For a more complete discussion see “The Bishop: Sent Forth to Sanctify” in *Lineamenta*, Sections 60-66.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., Section 894. For a more complete discussion see “The Bishop: Sent Forth to Rule and Guide the People of God” in *Lineamenta*, Sections 67-71.

<sup>97</sup> *Lineamenta*, Section 51.

authority, where bishops function not only as administrators but as moral elders within society.<sup>98</sup>

### *Priests and Deacons: Participatory Ministry*

Below bishops are priests and deacons, who share in the Church's ministry through the sacrament of Holy Orders.<sup>99</sup> Vatican II clarifies that priests and deacons share in the ministry of bishops at different levels: "The divinely established ecclesiastical ministry is exercised on different levels by... bishops, priests and deacons."<sup>100</sup> As one who has been ordained (receiving "orders"), the ministry is understood as functioning *in persona Christi* ("in the person of Christ"), reinforcing the sacramental nature of leadership rather than merely functional roles. There are, nevertheless, distinct roles for priests and deacons. Priests serve as co-workers of bishops in preaching, administering sacraments, and leading parishes under the guidance of a bishop. Deacons assist in liturgical and charitable ministries. This tiered structure reflects both unity and differentiation within ordained leadership.

### *Cardinals, Archbishops, and Roman Curia*

It is not surprising that with the scope of the RCC both numerically and geographically, that one finds a need for administrative levels between the Pope and the College of Bishops. Into that space, Cardinals, Archbishops, and *Roman Curia*<sup>101</sup> operate—primarily to aid in the administrative load required to keep a global hierarchy running smoothly with each group focused on specific administrative needs.

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<sup>98</sup> The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) explicitly describe the role of bishops as collaborative and socially engaged: Bishops exercise their pastoral office "through the pooling of wise counsel and experiences... to promote the greater good... adapted to the circumstances of the age," reflecting a leadership model, consistent with African communal traditions in which authority figures function as custodians of social harmony and moral guidance. Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC), "About SACBC," accessed 25 March 2026, <https://sacbc.org.za/about/>.

<sup>99</sup> For a more thorough examination of Holy Orders, see CCC, "Article 6: The Sacrament of Holy Orders", Sections 1536-1600.

<sup>100</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, Section 28.

<sup>101</sup> *Roman Curia* literally translates as "Court of Rome" and refers to administrative tasks and roles.

## Cardinals

Cardinals are the highest-ranking ecclesiastical office under the Pope. The College of Cardinals serves in two primary roles: “[the College of Cardinals] constitute a special college whose responsibility it is to provide for the election of the Roman Pontiff in accordance with the norm of special law; the cardinals also assist the Roman Pontiff collegially... and individually... in the daily care of the universal Church.”<sup>102</sup> Regarding the election of the new Pope, “The right to elect the Roman Pontiff belongs exclusively to the Cardinals of Holy Roman Church, with the exception of those who have reached their eightieth birthday before the day of the Roman Pontiff's death or the day when the Apostolic See becomes vacant. The maximum number of Cardinal electors must not exceed one hundred and twenty.”<sup>103</sup>

The advisory role, though rooted in tradition, is to assist the pope in deliberation on matters that impact the universal Church. Serving, in a sense, roles parallel to that of bishops (teaching, sanctifying, and governing), but with the whole church in view and in direct submission to the Pope, particularly in consistories, where they assist the pope in deliberation on matters concerning the universal Church. A consistory is a formal meeting of the College of Cardinals called by the pope: “The cardinals assist the Roman Pontiff... especially in consistories in which they are gathered by order of the Roman Pontiff and over which he presides.”<sup>104</sup> Canon Law identifies two categories of consistories:

- *Ordinary Consistory*: Attendance is only required of Cardinals residing in Rome and usually are convened for more “routine” acts such as the setting aside of new cardinals: “In an ordinary consistory all the cardinals present in Rome are called together... it is celebrated when certain solemnities are carried out, such as the conferral of the red hat.”<sup>105</sup> The voting on the case for new

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<sup>102</sup> Code of Canon Law (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1983), Canon 349.

<sup>103</sup> John Paul II, *Universi Dominici Gregis* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), Section 33. The process for election and the distribution of duties while the papacy is vacant are explained in some detail in the *Universi Dominici Gregis*.

<sup>104</sup> Code of Canon Law, Canon 349.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, Canon 353, Section 2.

saints—the last step before canonization—is also a publicly held ordinary consistory. These consistories are often public and more liturgical in form.

- *Extraordinary Consistory*: Attendance is required of the entire College of Cardinals (unless one is over 80 years of age) as the content requires more deliberation and consultation over matters that impact the universal Church: “In an extraordinary consistory all the cardinals are called together... when the needs of the Church or the gravity of matters suggest it.”<sup>106</sup> While Canon Lawe does not list specific topics, modern consistories have addressed topics such as evangelization and mission, curial reform, and challenges facing the Church globally. While the Code does not enumerate specific topics, it explicitly links such gatherings to “questions of major importance.”<sup>107</sup>—A suggestion has been made by the College of Cardinals for an annual Extraordinary Consistory to be held moving forward.<sup>108</sup>

Consistories, therefore, serve as structured moments in which the hierarchical unity of the RCC is exercised through consultation and shared responsibility.

## Archbishops

Archbishops provide another stage of hierarchy between bishops and the papacy. Unlike Cardinals that function directly under the Pope and centre their work in Rome, archbishops directly supervise bishops serv-

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., Canon 353, Section 3.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., Canon 349. In January 2026, Pope Leo XIV held his first Extraordinary Consistory to address four key issues: the role of the College of Cardinals in Leo XIV’s governance, the future of synodality, the reform of the Curia, and broad questions about the liturgy (“The Extraordinary Consistory: What’s on Pope Leo XIV’s Agenda” EWTN Africa, 7 January 2026. Accessed on 26 March 2026 at: <https://ewtnafrica.com/2026/01/07/the-extraordinary-consistory-whats-on-pope-leo-xivs-agenda/>. See also, Pope Leo XIV’s public statement following the extraordinary consistory at <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/speeches/2026/january/documents/20260107-concistoro-straordinario.html>.

<sup>108</sup> “The Extraordinary Consistory” EWTN, 7 January 2026

ing in large urban/metropolitan areas referred to as a province: “An ecclesiastical province is a grouping of neighboring particular churches... under the direction of a Metropolitan, who is the Archbishop of the principal see.”<sup>109</sup> This function follows the teaching that while bishops serve as successors of the apostles governing the particular churches entrusted to them, they do so “within a structured communion.”<sup>110</sup> The archbishop of a metropolitan province not only provides guidance for the bishops under his care, but also ensures “that faith and ecclesiastical discipline are carefully observed and should inform the Roman Pontiff of abuses, if there are any.”<sup>111</sup> Canon Law defines these responsibilities setting limits for supervisory authority while providing particular focus of supervision in two areas: adherence to doctrine and discipline among the priesthood (and churches)<sup>112</sup> This structure demonstrates how the Church balances local episcopal autonomy with regional coordination, thereby strengthening unity without undermining the authority of individual bishops.

## Roman Curia

The *Roman Curia*, sometimes just referenced as the *Curia*, refers to the mechanism that oversees the large administrative operation of the RCC. The structure and functions of the *Roman Curia* are primarily defined in the *Praedicate Evangelium* by Pope Francis in 2022 in which he sought to bring updated reforms to the *Curia*. Note the title of the reform document means “Preach the Gospel” and highlights a primary purpose for restructuring the *Curia*: “...reform is not an end in itself, but a means to give a more convincing witness to Christ; to favour a more effective evangelization...”<sup>113</sup> The RCC, therefore, directly views a connection between the tasks of administration and the proclamation of the Gospel! The *Curia* is not an independent authority but functions

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<sup>109</sup> Vatican Council II, *Christus Dominus* (1965), Section 39.

<sup>110</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, Section 23.

<sup>111</sup> *Christus Dominus*, Section 44.

<sup>112</sup> Code of Canon Law, Canons 435-438.

<sup>113</sup> Pope Francis, *Praedicate Evangelium: On the Roman Curia and Its Service to the Church in the World* (Vatican City: Holy See Press Office, 2022), Article 12. Downloaded on 26 March 2026 from: [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_constitutions/documents/20220319-costituzione-ap-praedicate-evangelium.html).

*in service* to the Pope under his jurisdiction.<sup>114</sup> Organizationally, “The *Roman Curia* is composed of the Secretariat of State, the Dicasteries and other Institutions, all juridically equal among themselves.”<sup>115</sup>

### **Secretariat of State<sup>116</sup>**

The Secretariat<sup>117</sup> of State is the primary institution within the *Curia*. It is headed by the Cardinal Secretary of State and is further divided into three sections:

- *The Section for General Affairs*: “...is responsible in a particular way for expediting matters involving the day-to-day service of the Roman Pontiff...”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., Article 1: “The *Roman Curia* is primarily an instrument at the service of the successor of Peter to assist him in his mission...”

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., Article 12, Section 1.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. All of chapter IV (Articles 44-52) focus on the Secretariat of State.

<sup>117</sup> The term “secretariat” derives from the Latin, *secretaries*, and means “one entrusted with secrets” or more commonly, “secretaries.” Secretariat can refer to an office of Secretary, the clerical staff of an organization, or an administrative department of an organization. Often used of governments. “Secretariat.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/secretariat>. Accessed 26 Mar. 2026.

<sup>118</sup> *Praedicate Evangelium*, Article 46. Articles 47-48 provide a thorough list of some of the tasks: “...drawing up and dispatching...documents entrusted to it by the Roman Pontiff...preparing for publication the acts and public documents of the Holy See...giving directions to the Dicastery for Communication regarding official announcements concerning the acts of the Roman Pontiff and the activity of the Holy See...guarding the lead seal and the Fisherman’s ring...handle preparations for the periodic meetings of the heads of curial institutions and to enact the decisions made therein...prepare the appropriate documents concerning appointments made or approved by the Roman Pontiff...prepare documentation for the granting of papal honours...collect, coordinate and publish statistics regarding the life of the Church throughout the world.”

- *The Section for Relations with States and International Organizations*: “...the specific task...is to attend to matters dealing with the respective civil authorities.”<sup>119</sup>
- *The Section for Diplomatic Personnel of the Holy See*: “...deals with questions concerning persons who serve in the diplomatic service of the Holy See, and in particular their living and working conditions and their ongoing formation.”<sup>120</sup>

## Dicasteries<sup>121</sup>

Dicasteries serving as oversight for different areas of focus within the RCC are the primary administrative structures of the *Curia*, each ordinarily headed by a prefect.<sup>122</sup>

They maintain policy and provide support. Each of the sixteen dicasteries addresses the administration of different aspects and specialized functions of the life and ministry of the RCC necessary to fulfill the mission of the Church. Together, they are understood as how the RCC is empowered to “Preach the Gospel.” The list of Dicasteries with the *Praedicate Evangelium* Articles discussing them are listed below:<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., Article 49. Article 49 also provides specific responsibilities: “for fostering the diplomatic and political relations of the Holy See with States and other subjects of international law... for representing the Holy See in international intergovernmental organizations and multilateral intergovernmental conferences... for granting approval whenever a Dicastery or Institution of the Roman Curia intends to publish a statement or a document relating to international affairs or relations with civil authorities.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., Article 52. This section oversees the selection, training, and care of diplomatic personnel.

<sup>121</sup> “dicasteries” is Greek *dikasterion* court of law, from *dikastes* and refers to a court of law where decisions are made. “Dicastery.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dicastery>. Accessed 26 Mar. 2026.

<sup>122</sup> *Praedicate Evangelium*, Article 13. The entirety of chapter V (articles 52-188) provides explanations of the sixteen (16) dicasteries.

<sup>123</sup> It should be noted that the total number of Dicasteries was reduced: “It has been necessary to reduce the number of the Dicasteries, unifying those whose purpose was very similar or complementary, and streamlining their functions with the aim of avoiding an overlap of competencies and improving the effectiveness of their work.” *Praedicate Evangelium*, Article 11.

- Dicastery for Evangelization (art. 53-68)<sup>124</sup>
- Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith (art. 69-78)
- Dicastery for the Service of Charity (art. 79-81)
- Dicastery for the Eastern Churches (art. 82-87)
- Dicastery for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments (art. 88-97)
- Dicastery for the Causes of Saints (art. 98-102)
- Dicastery for Bishops (art. 103-112)
- Dicastery for the Clergy (art. 113-120)
- Dicastery for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (art.121-127)
- Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life (art. 128-141)
- Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity (art. 142-146)
- Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue (art. 147-152)
- Dicastery for Culture and Education (art. 153-162)
- Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development (art. 163-174)
- Dicastery for Legislative Texts (art. 175-182)
- Dicastery for Communication (art. 183-188)

## Institutions

The final category of major divisions within the *Roman Curia* is that of “Institutions”. While dicasteries are specialized departments within the Roman Curia, institutions encompass a broader range of bodies that assist the Pope and bishops in their pastoral responsibilities. These institutions fall under one of three categories.

### *Institutions of Justice*

“The service provided by the Institutions of Justice is one of the essential functions in the governance of the Church... that of the Church’s own mission: to proclaim and inaugurate the Kingdom of God and to work, through the order of justice applied with canonical equity, for the salvation of souls, which is always the supreme law in

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<sup>124</sup> The Dicastery for Evangelism is further divided into two sections: *The Section for Fundamental Questions regarding Evangelization in the World* (Articles 55-60) and *The Section for the First Evangelization and New Particular Churches* (Articles 61-68).

the Church.”<sup>125</sup> The Institutions of Justice are composed of three independent institutions:

- *Apostolic Penitentiary*: “The Apostolic Penitentiary is competent in all matters regarding the internal forum and indulgences as expressions of divine mercy”<sup>126</sup>
- *Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatura*: “The Apostolic Signatura functions as the Church’s Supreme Tribunal and also ensures that justice in the Church is correctly administered.”<sup>127</sup>
- *Tribunal of the Roman Rota*: “The Tribunal of the Roman Rota ordinarily acts as an appellate court of higher instance at the Apostolic See, with the purpose of safeguarding rights within the Church; it fosters unity of jurisprudence and, by virtue of its decisions, provides assistance to lower tribunals.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> *Praedicate Evangelium*, Article 189.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 190, Section 1. “For the internal forum, whether sacramental or non-sacramental, it grants absolution from censures, dispensations, commutations, validations, remissions and other favours.” (Article 190) “The Apostolic Penitentiary is charged with the granting and use of indulgences...” (Article 193).

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 194. “The Apostolic Signatura, as a tribunal of ordinary jurisdiction, adjudicates: 1. complaints of nullity and petitions for *restitutio in integrum* against sentences of the Roman Rota; 2. recourses in cases involving the status of persons when the Roman Rota has denied a new examination of the case; 3. exceptions of suspicion and other proceedings against judges of the Roman Rota arising from the exercise of their functions; 4. conflicts of competence between tribunals which are not subject to the same appellate tribunal.” (Article 196). “The Apostolic Signatura, as an administrative institution of justice in disciplinary matters, is also competent: 1. to exercise vigilance over the correct administration of justice in the different ecclesiastical tribunals and, if need be, to censure officials, advocates or procurators; 2. to adjudicate petitions presented to the Apostolic See for obtaining the referral of a case to the Roman Rota; 3. to adjudicate concerning any other request relative to the administration of justice; 4. to extend the competence of lower tribunals; 5. to grant approval of a tribunal of appeal” (Article 198).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, Article 200, Section 1.

*The Institution of Finance*

The last “Institution” works with the administrative oversight of the finances of the RCC. This institution is comprised of several departments:

- *Council for the Economy*: “The Council for the Economy is competent for supervising the administrative and financial structures and activities of curial institutions and offices and of institutions associated with the Holy See or that relate to it, as indicated in the list attached to the Council’s statutes.”<sup>129</sup>
- *Secretariat for the Economy*: “The Secretariat for the Economy functions as a Papal Secretariat for economic and financial matters.”<sup>130</sup>
- *Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See*: “The Administration of the Patrimony of the Apostolic See is the entity responsible for the administration and management of the real estate and movable assets of the Holy See which are meant to provide the resources necessary for the Roman Curia properly to carry out its work for the good of, and in service to, the particular Churches.”<sup>131</sup>
- *Office of the Auditor General*: “The Auditor General’s Office is charged with auditing the consolidated financial statements of the Holy See.”<sup>132</sup>
- *Commission for Confidential Matters*: “The Commission for Confidential Matters is competent: 1. to authorize any legal, economic or financial act that for the greater good of the Church or of persons must be kept confidential and removed from the examination and supervision of the competent entities; 2. to monitor contracts of the Holy See which by law demand confidentiality and to exercise vigilance over them.”<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., Article 205, Section 1.

<sup>130</sup> Article 212, Section 1.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., Article 219, Section 1.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., Article 222.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., Article 225.

- *Committee for Investments*: “The Committee for Investments is responsible for guaranteeing the ethical nature of the Holy See’s equity investments in accordance with the Church’s social doctrine and, at the same time, monitoring their profitability, propriety and degree of risk.”<sup>134</sup>

One can recognize that due to its global scope and size, the formal hierarchy needed for proper administration of the RCC is immense. The *Roman Curia* provides a formal structure to cover the administration of doctrine, personnel, properties, and everything in between. These multiple roles reflect an increasingly complex global institution, enabling coordination across over a billion adherents worldwide. While not covered here, the *Praedicate Evangelium* does provide additional administrative structures to include additional offices<sup>135</sup> and advocates<sup>136</sup> that aid in the running of the Church.

## Leadership Styles in the RCC

Having examined the well-organized leadership structure of the RCC, one needs to consider how these structures are experienced in leadership styles. Four important aspects of RCC leadership styles should be highlighted. First, one must understand that leadership in the RCC is understood as sacramental. As mentioned above, the receiving of Holy Orders is understood to be a sacrament. It is received by all clergy and is distinguished from laity which can receive Holy Matrimony as a sacrament. RCC teaches that ordination confers a permanent spiritual character. Leadership is not simply a role but *a transformation of being*:

...priesthood is ministerial. “That office...which the Lord committed to the pastors of his people, is in the strict sense

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid., Article 227, Section 1.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., the entirety of Chapter VII (Articles 228-237) describes specialized offices: *Prefecture of the Papal Household* (Articles 228-230); *Office for the Liturgical Celebrations of the Supreme Pontiff* (Articles 231-234); *The Camerlengo of the Holy Roman Church* (Articles 235-237).

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., the entirety of Chapter VIII (238-240) describes specialized advocates: *Register of Advocates at the Roman Curia* (Articles 238-239); *The Corps of Advocates of the Holy See* (Article 240).

of the term a service.” It is entirely related to Christ and to men. It depends entirely on Christ and on his unique priesthood; it has been instituted for the good of men and the communion of the Church. the sacrament of Holy Orders communicates a “sacred power” which is none other than that of Christ. the exercise of this authority must therefore be measured against the model of Christ.<sup>137</sup>

This distinguishes Catholic leadership from functional or charismatic models. A second important facet is that while the RCC is very hierarchical, the priests engage in pastoral leadership well emphasizing care for souls (*cura animarum*). Vatican II reoriented leadership toward service, describing the Church as a pilgrim community and highlighting the pastoral responsibility of leaders rather than mere juridical authority.<sup>138</sup> A third dynamic within the leadership style of the RCC is a move from a strict rule of the Colleges (Bishop and Cardinal) to incorporate Synods to provide a consultative process involving bishops, clergy, and laity. While authority remains rooted in the hierarchical structure, decision-making often includes international conferences, Synods of bishops, or consultations within local diocese.

Vatican II produced a document, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests) in which great direction is given to the manner in which a priest both conducts ministry and lives in the community.<sup>139</sup> A final aspect of leadership style that is critical to understand is that the RCC places an emphasis upon “servant” leadership for every level of ecclesiastical leader. This “servant” style of leadership as defined

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<sup>137</sup> CCC, Section 1551.

<sup>138</sup> John L. McKenzie, “Structure of the Church,” in *Roman Catholicism, Encyclopædia Britannica*, updated February 27, 2026, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Roman-Catholicism/Structure-of-the-church>. Accessed on 26 March 2026.

<sup>139</sup> Vatican Council II, *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests), December 7, 1965. Accessed from: [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651207\\_presbyterorum-ordinis\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_presbyterorum-ordinis_en.html) on 26 March 2026.

by the RCC can be summed up in five descriptions: Christ-centered,<sup>140</sup> pastoral,<sup>141</sup> sacrificial,<sup>142</sup> communal,<sup>143</sup> and humbly obedient.<sup>144</sup> In summary, the Catholic Church does not view priests as rulers over a community, but as servants who lead by love, sacrifice, and pastoral care.

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<sup>140</sup> The Second Vatican Council teaches explicitly that priests must imitate Christ's self-giving service: "They should conduct themselves...after the example of their Master, who... 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.'" (Ibid., Section 9). Priestly authority is not understood as power over others, but as participation in Christ's sacrificial service.

<sup>141</sup> Priests as Shepherds Who Serve the People: "They are to live as good shepherds that know their sheep...and lead them." (Ibid., Section 1, Point). Particular "Shepherd" aspects include personal care ("know their sheep"); relational leadership (not distant authority); and charity and kindness as governing principles.

<sup>142</sup> Following the example of Christ, the priest is called to give "...a complete gift of themselves to the flock committed to them." (Ibid., Section 14). Sacrificial living is also considered a call to holiness in their separation from the world: "strongly urges all priests that they strive always for that growth in holiness by which they will become consistently better instruments in the service of the whole People of God" (Ibid., Section 12). Servant leadership, thus, is NOT minimal service, but requires complete devotion.

<sup>143</sup> Priests are set apart *sacramentally* but not *socially detached*. Vatican II notes the tensions for the priest of being in the world, yet not of it: "Priests of the New Testament, by their vocation and ordination, are in a certain sense set apart in the bosom of the People of God. However, they are not to be separated from the People of God or from any person... They cannot be ministers of Christ unless they be witnesses and dispensers of a life other than earthly life. But they cannot be of service to men if they remain strangers to the life and conditions of men. Their ministry itself, by a special title, forbids that they be conformed to this world; yet at the same time it requires that they live in this world among men." (Ibid., Section 3). Servant leadership requires proximity to people, understanding human conditions resulting in pastoral presence rather than a separatist elitism. Communal dynamic is also understood as working toward "...the formation of a genuine Christian community." (Ibid., Section 6).

<sup>144</sup> Servant-like obedience performed humbly is highly commended: "Among the virtues that priests must possess for their sacred ministry none is so important as a frame of mind and soul whereby they are always ready to know and do the will of him who sent them and not their own will... With humble disposition he waits upon all whom God has sent him to serve in the work assigned to him and in the multiple experiences of his life." (Ibid., Section 15). Contrary to a leadership style based on personal ambition, servant leadership requires obedience to God and the Church, renunciation of self-interest, and submission to the divine mission.

## Baptists and RCC Leadership

Considering a sub-Saharan context, leadership structure and style intersects with African culture at several points that should be noted by Baptists. The primary points of tension seem to rise around the strict hierarchical structure when it seems to be in contention with the more community-centered leadership of African cultures. Magesa notes that that African morality is fundamentally communal and relational, where ethical life is defined by participation in the community and keeping harmony in relationships; therefore, this relational worldview both complements and challenges hierarchical models such as the leadership structure of the RCC by emphasizing participation, reciprocal authority, and moral accountability within the community.<sup>145</sup> Bujo similarly argues for an “ecclesiology of communion” that integrates African communal values with Catholic structures, fostering greater participation of the laity.<sup>146</sup> Such engagements of the RCC from African scholars and the call for a integration of RCC hierarchy and African participatory leadership provide insights for Baptists in evaluating the bridges and barriers with the RCC leadership structures and styles.

### *Bridges for Engagement*

While the leadership *structure* is quite different between the RCC and Baptists, much common ground can be discerned in leadership *styles*. The emphasis on incarnational and servant leadership resonates with most Baptists. One must, however, be impressed with the organizational capacity of the RCC. Further, because of this administrative efficiency, the RCC demonstrates an impressive ability to engage in social

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<sup>145</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 66.

<sup>146</sup> Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context* (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications-Africa, 1992), p. 22. Bujo contends that “the African understanding of the human person is that of a being-in-communion,” which should shape the Church’s structure and life toward greater inclusivity and participation. For Bujo, the Church in Africa must embody a lived *koinonia* in which authority is exercised not merely juridically but within the matrix of communal relationships, thereby integrating African communal values with Catholic hierarchical structures. (Ibid.)

development. The clear lines of structure and authority enable a clearer line of communication for effective engagement.

### *Barriers for Engagement*

The greatest hindrances are the theological implications of the RCC structure and doctrine. First, the sacramental understanding of the priesthood is in direct conflict with a Baptist understanding of the completed work of Christ. Grace is not dispensed through the conveyance of the sacraments by the priest, but directly by Christ. This truth highlights the second critical understanding that is problematic—the mediatorial role of priests. Similarly, as every believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, there is no need for a human mediator, let alone a priest other than Jesus. Beyond the theological barriers, some barriers in the application of the RCC structures are noteworthy. As the structure can inhibit participatory decision-making, it can reinforce the notion of the priest as a “spirit power” person that alone can discern guidance from God. This thinking can cause further syncretization with ATR that have a similar understanding of the spiritual leader. Similarly, sometimes heavily structured institutions can create distance from the local congregation.

### *Conclusions*

At first glance, one can readily acknowledge the strength of the administrative structures of the RCC. The fact that a global institution with over a billion members can operate with any efficiency is amazing. Nevertheless, the complicated structures can create distance between members and leadership. The enforcement of the form of the RCC that speaks into every facet of church life provides an opportunity for participation to become ritualistic and disconnected. In summary, the RCC has as its source of **authority** Apostolic succession, has a hierarchical **structure**, practices a **leadership style** that is sacramental and institutional while striving to be servant-oriented, and finds **accountability** in its hierarchy.

## ISLAM

Islam has had a significant impact on all of Africa, but in recent years has seen a steady growth across sub-Saharan Africa. Rodgers notes:<sup>147</sup>

The spread of Islam was made possible through initial military conquests and capitalizing on existing trade routes. The conversion of key peoples who were the main merchants of their day led to a religion that could spread rapidly and cross borders with ease. Islam has continued to grow to this day through the migration of peoples.

Instead of a discussion in the progress of Islam or a focus on the broader teachings of Islam, this volume is concerned with leadership structures and styles found in Islam and the points of intersection with both African culture and Baptists. Islam presents a comprehensive framework for leadership that integrates religious, legal, and social authority. Unlike most churches in Christianity, Islam does not possess a formal priesthood or pastoral shepherds; instead, leadership is distributed among scholars, jurists, and community leaders whose authority derives from knowledge of the Qur'an, Hadith, and Sharia (Islamic law). In other words, authority is gained through knowledge and training rather than ordination. As Islam has moved across Africa,<sup>148</sup> these structures have developed both in traditional Islamic forms as well as more syncretized contextual forms of "folk" Islam.

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<sup>147</sup> Rodgers, *Introduction*, p. 29. For a concise summary of the spread of Islam from the first Hijrah in the mid-600s to the modern era, see Rodgers (pp. 23-29).

<sup>148</sup> Regarding the growth of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa, Rodgers—in 2021—noted: "Today there are seven countries in Sub-Saharan Africa with Muslim majority populations: Niger (98.3%), Senegal (96.1%), Gambia (95.7%), Mali (95%), Guinea (89.1%), Sierra Leone (78.6%), and Burkina Faso (61.5%). [All statistical data is taken from the *World Factbook* on [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)] However, almost every country in Sub-Saharan Africa has a growing Muslim population. In 2020, there were 311,000,000 Muslims in Sub-Saharan Africa making up 30.3% of the total population. This means Sub-Saharan Africa is home to roughly 16% of the global Muslim population. Nigeria has the fifth-highest population of Muslims worldwide and is first in Africa. The spread of Islam has been wide, but it has also been deep." (pp. 28-29).

## Theological Foundations of Leadership in Islam

For Islam, any discussion of leadership begins with the principle that ultimate authority belongs to Allah. The Qur'an presents leadership as a moral trust (*amānah*) and a responsibility before God: "Verily! Allah commands that you should render back the trusts to those, to whom they are due; and that when you judge between men, you judge with justice. Verily, how excellent is the teaching which He (Allah) gives you." (Qur'an 4:58).<sup>149</sup> Not only is all authority understood as having Allah as its source, but The Qur'an further establishes leadership as divinely guided: "And We made from among them... leaders, giving guidance under Our Command, when they were patient and used to believe with certainty in Our Ayat" (Qur'an 32:24).<sup>150</sup> Omar states that "Islam views leadership as the most important element that would drive organizations or states forward... This is because, leadership according to Islam has two direct relationships at one time, namely obeying the ruling of Allah (SWT) and fulfilling the interests of the society at large."<sup>151</sup> Leadership is thus not merely administrative or even political but deeply spiritual. Classic Muslim scholars provided foundational definitions. Imam al-Mawardi defined Islamic leadership as "a task to replace the prophetic duty in preserving the religion (Islam) and managing worldly life"<sup>152</sup> in other words, the continuation of the Prophetic mission in preserving religion and ordering society. Similarly, classic scholar "Ibn Khaldun defined leadership as the same responsibility as the caliph where it should lead all human beings to live according to Shari'ah for the balanced well-being in both this world and the hereafter."<sup>153</sup> One must understand, therefore, that for the faithful Muslim,

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<sup>149</sup> "Quran in English" Trans. Dr. Muhammed Aamir. Downloaded from <https://easyislamforall.com/quran-in-english-pdf/online> on 27 March 2026.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., Dr Aamir explains Ayat as meaning "proofs, evidences, verses, lessons, signs, revelations, etc."

<sup>151</sup> Mohd Faridh Hafez Mhd Omar "Humane Leadership in Islamic Practices" in *Leadership—New Insights*, Ed. Mário José Batista Franco (IntechOpen Online 2022) DOI: 10.5772/intechopen.95224. Accessed online at <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/81164> on 27 March 2026 and Downloaded from [https://www.academia.edu/79709147/Humane\\_Leadership\\_in\\_Islamic\\_Approaches](https://www.academia.edu/79709147/Humane_Leadership_in_Islamic_Approaches) on 27 March 2026.

<sup>152</sup> Al-Mawardi, *Al-Aḥkām al-Sultāniyyah*, as cited by Omar (Ibid.)

<sup>153</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah*, as cited by Omar (Ibid.)

Islamic leadership is inseparable from obedience to God, moral accountability, and eschatological responsibility.

In considering the theological foundations of Islamic leadership, two important ideas must be understood. First, as stated above, all authority is understood as resting in Allah; therefore, human leaders are entrusted with stewardship rather than true autonomous authority. Proper leadership exercised is seen as representative actions under the guidance of Allah. This understanding is initially established at the creation (Qur'an 2:30). All human leadership is ultimately accountable, and subordinate to divine law, distinguishing Islamic governance from purely secular systems. Second, one needs to recognize the role of Sharia in governance. Sharia—derived from the Qur'an and Hadith—constitutes the normative framework for leadership governing legal rulings, social conduct, and political authority. Leaders are expected to uphold justice and "...conduct their affairs by mutual consultation." (Qur'an 42:38).

## Leadership Structures in Islam

### *The Caliphate*

Historically, the primary political structure in Islam was the Caliphate, in which the Caliph (*khalifah*) functioned as both political and religious leader of the Muslim community (*ummah*). Faisal argues that "The era of the Pious Caliphate (632-661 CE) is widely regarded as the golden age of Islamic governance, where the theoretical principles were put into practice with remarkable success"<sup>154</sup> exemplifying rule rooted in justice, consultation, and accountability. Faisal notes the primary contributions of the first four Caliphs which would provide the foundational understanding of Islamic Leadership:<sup>155</sup>

- *Hazrat Abu Bakr, The Foundation of Unity and Accountability*: "elected the first Caliph establishing the precedent for a consultative,

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<sup>154</sup> Hamda Faisal, "Governance in Islam: Shura, Legislation, and the Legacy of the Pious Caliphate," 2025. Accessed at: <https://www.howtests.com/articles/governance-in-islam-shura-legislation-and-the-legacy-of-the-pious-caliphate> on 29 March 2026.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

non-hereditary system of succession...[he] consulted with the senior companions on all major decision, upholding the principle of Shuria.”<sup>156</sup>

- *Hazrot Umar ibn al-Khottab, The Architect of Islamic Administration*: “the second Caliph...responsible for creating an administrative structure that became a model for centuries. He established the concept of judicial independence by separating the judiciary from the executive branch and appointed judges based on their knowledge and piety. He created a comprehensive administrative system, including provinces, a regular army, and a land survey...”<sup>157</sup>
- *Hazrot Usman ibn ‘Afran, Pragmatism in a Time of Prosperity*: “the third Caliph presided over a period of unprecedented expansion and wealth. His most significant contribution was commissioning the compilation and standardization of the Holy Quran, which prevented future disputes over its text. He managed... with a focus on publica welfare and economic expansion, overseeing the construction of roads, bridges, and public infrastructure. He also established the first Muslim navy, which played a crucial role in defending the empire and securing trade routes.”<sup>158</sup>
- *Hazrot Ali ibn Abi Talib, The Standard-Bearer of Justice and Equity*: “the fourth Caliph is a beacon of justice and administrative ethics... He was known for his absolute adherence to the rule of law...”<sup>159</sup>

While the caliph did not possess *prophetic* authority, classical Sunni political theory understood the office as necessary for the preservation of religion and the orderly governance of society.<sup>160</sup> The Caliph’s authority was not absolute but bounded by *Sharia*, derived from: the Qur’an,

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 20–23.

the Sunnah, *ijma* (consensus), *qiyas* (analogy), and *ijtihad* (independent reasoning).<sup>161</sup> The early caliphs, thus, established a model in which leadership was passed on through a combination of recognition of role in the community, consultation, and purposeful selection among qualified candidates.<sup>162</sup> The abolition of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924<sup>163</sup> marked the end of the classical institution, yet its underlying principles—moral accountability, legal fidelity, and communal legitimacy—continue to inform modern discussions of Islamic leadership.<sup>164</sup>

### *Ulama: Scholarly Leaders*

In the absence of a unified caliphal authority, leadership in Islam has become increasingly decentralized, with the *ulama* (religious scholars) assuming a central role in guiding the moral, legal, and spiritual life of Muslim communities. These scholars derive their authority not from ordination to an office, but from mastery of the Islamic studies, particularly the Qur'an, Hadith, jurisprudence, and legal methodology.<sup>165</sup> The Qur'an seems to grant a special status to those with greater knowledge, when asking rhetorically, "...Say: 'Are those who know equal to those who know not?' It is only men of understanding who will remember (i.e. get a lesson from Allah's Signs and Verses)" (Q 39:9).<sup>166</sup> This foundation establishes the authority of the *ulama*, who are, therefore, expected to provide authoritative interpretation of the

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<sup>161</sup> Faisal, "Governance in Islam."

<sup>162</sup> Hugh Kennedy, *The Prophet and the Age of the Caliphates*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004), pp.50–55.

<sup>163</sup> While the Ottoman Empire ended shortly after WW I, the Caliphate was allowed to continue; however, following the Turkish War of Independence, the Republic of Turkey was established and the Grand National Assembly formally abolished the caliphate on 3 March 1924, ending a 412-year institution. For a brief overview of the history of the Ottoman Empire and the Caliphate see "The Ottoman Empire: 600 Years of Domination." Accessed at: <https://www.ancient-origins.net/ancient-places-europe/ottoman-empire-0013297> on 29 March 2026.

<sup>164</sup> Noah Feldman, *The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), pp. 29–31.

<sup>165</sup> Jonathan A. C. Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad: The Challenges and Choices of Interpreting the Prophet's Legacy* (London: Oneworld, 2014), pp. 45–50.

<sup>166</sup> "Quran in English" Trans. Dr. Muhammed Aamir. The parenthetic explanation provided by the translator.

Qur'an and Hadith, to issue legal opinions (*fatwas*) based on this knowledge, to provide judgements on ethical dilemmas, and to provide doctrinal continuity—in other words to provide ongoing moral and spiritual guidance for Muslim communities.

In practice, these scholars do not function as political leaders as much as independent authorities offering a balance to politicians. In contemporary Africa, this model is seen in the creation of continental and national scholarly bodies. For example, the Union of African Muslim Scholars, an International institution headquartered in Mali, which states as its vision “a legitimate scientific reference for reawakening of Islamic community in Africa”<sup>167</sup> serves as continental networks that guide Islamic thought and practice across Africa and currently boasts a registration of over 600 *ulamas* in 46 countries in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>168</sup>

Through such institutions, one witnesses the issuing of collective rulings that reflect both classical jurisprudence and local socio-cultural realities across the continent. Beyond these formal institutional structures, however, Kane demonstrates how networks of learning (*turuq*, *madrasas*, and scholarly lineages) sustain Islamic authority across West and East Africa.<sup>169</sup> This decentralized yet intellectually rigorous model underscores the reality of knowledge as a primary basis of leadership in Islam.

### *Imams: Religious Leadership*

While the *ulama* provide foundations for practice, the *imam* is the one who is seen leading in prayer and providing spiritual guidance on a local level for most Muslims, functioning as the primary religious leader within the mosque **and** the immediate community. The duties of an

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<sup>167</sup> “Vision” in *Introduction* on the UAMS website. Accessed at: <http://africanulama.org/en/introduction/> on 29 March 2026. The site explains that the idea behind the Union is “The creation of an union for the scholars of sub-Saharan in Africa to serve as a scientific instance reference and effective among African communities, strengthens the role of scholars and preachers in directing community at all strata and levels, regulates fatwas, interacts according to the continent public events and represents Muslims in large meetings: local, regional and international.” The Union in 2019 registered 512 ulemas from 46 countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. “Members” as of 04/11/2021 (<http://africanulama.org/en/membres/>).

<sup>169</sup> Ousmane Kane, *Beyond Timbuktu: An Intellectual History of Muslim West Africa* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), pp, 220–230.

*imam* encompass liturgical, educational, pastoral, and social responsibilities, include the following:

- *Leading Prayers (Ṣalah)*: The primary and most visible duty of the imam is to lead the five daily prayers and the congregational Friday prayer (ṣalāt al-jumu'ah). The imam ensures the proper performance of the prayer, including correct recitation of the Qur'an and adherence to prescribed ritual forms. "The one who is most versed in the Book of God should lead the people in prayer..."<sup>170</sup> This Hadith establishes knowledge of the Qur'an as a key criterion for leadership.
- *Delivering the Friday sermon (Khutbah)*: A central weekly duty of the imam is delivering the *khutbah* during Friday congregational prayer. This sermon serves not only as religious instruction but also as moral exhortation and communal guidance. The Qur'an underscores the significance of the gathering: "O you who believe! When the call is proclaimed for the prayer on Friday, hasten earnestly to the remembrance of God..." (Q 62:9). The *khutbah* traditionally includes praise of Allah, invocation of blessings upon the Prophet, exhortation to righteousness, and reflection on contemporary issues in light of Islamic teachings.<sup>171</sup>
- *Teaching and Interpretation of Islamic Knowledge*: Imams play a crucial role in teaching the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic law (*fiqh*), both formally in mosque settings and informally within the community. This educational function reflects the emphasis on knowledge as a foundation of religious life. In practice, imams often con-

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<sup>170</sup> Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqui (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1971), Book 4, Hadith 673, p. 300. Downloaded on 29 March 2026 from: [https://ia800506.us.archive.org/27/items/SAHEEHMUSLIM\\_201811/SAHEEH%20MUSLIM.pdf](https://ia800506.us.archive.org/27/items/SAHEEHMUSLIM_201811/SAHEEH%20MUSLIM.pdf)

<sup>171</sup> Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Shari'ah Law: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), pp. 97–99. Downloaded at: <https://dn721800.ca.archive.org/0/items/mohammad-hashim-kamali-freedom-of-expression-in-islam/Mohammad%20Hashim%20Kamali%20-%20Shari%27ah%20Law%20An%20Introduction.pdf> on 29 March 2026.

duct classes, lead study circles, and provide instruction on ritual practice, ethics, and doctrine.<sup>172</sup>

- *Providing Pastoral Care and Moral Guidance:* Beyond formal teaching, the imam serves as a pastoral figure who offers counsel on personal, familial, and spiritual matters.
- *Officiating Religious Functions:* Imams commonly officiate key life-cycle events and community religious functions, including Marriage ceremonies; Funeral prayers; Naming ceremonies and other rites.
- *Community Leadership:* In many contexts—especially in Africa—the imam serves as a community leader who fosters unity, mediates disputes, and represents the Muslim community in broader society. Imams often engage in inter-religious dialogue, social development initiatives, and public advocacy, thereby extending their influence beyond strictly liturgical functions.<sup>173</sup>

In all these roles, the Imam is seen as the one who maintains the standard for moral and religious integrity for the Muslim community. In African contexts, the role of the imam often extends beyond liturgical leadership to encompass social mediation, education, and community development. The institution of the “Chief Imam,” found in countries such as Ghana and Nigeria, illustrates how local religious leadership can assume broader regional significance, serving as a focal point for communal identity and inter-religious engagement.<sup>174</sup>

### *Councils and Organizations*

In contemporary contexts, Islamic organizations—such as councils of scholars or national Islamic bodies—serve as additional leadership engagement

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<sup>172</sup> Brown, *Misquoting Muhammad*, pp. 47–49.

<sup>173</sup> Abdulkader Tayob, *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams, and Sermons* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), pp. 90–95. Accessed on 29 March 2026 at: [https://openlibrary.org/books/OL369291M/Islam\\_in\\_South\\_Africa](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL369291M/Islam_in_South_Africa)

<sup>174</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983), pp. 210–212. Accessed at: <https://archive.org/details/west-africanchris0000sann> on 29 March 2026.

with both hierarchical and consultative structures. Many countries have some form of Muslim Supreme Council. For example, in Nigeria, the Nigerian Supreme Council on Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) describes itself as: “the apex Islamic authority in Nigeria... established to cater for, preserve, protect, promote and advance the interests of Islam and the Muslims throughout Nigeria.”<sup>175</sup> As such, they list three primary functions:<sup>176</sup>

- Promote the continued application of Shari’ah in Nigeria and the observance of Islamic morality. The Council shall, therefore, ensure that the ideals of Islam as laid down in the Glorious Qur’an and the Sunnah of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (P.B.O.H) are adhered to by all Muslims in Nigeria.
- Promote Islamic solidarity through fostering brotherhood and co-operation among Muslims in Nigeria and other parts of the World.
- Serve as a channel of contact with the Government Authorities on Islamic Affairs.

The NSCIA, while similar in purpose, is not as structured as some councils in other countries.<sup>177</sup> Some countries such as South Africa have a larger hierarchical structure with a “supreme council” which coordinates efforts nationally and internationally<sup>178</sup> and regional coun-

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<sup>175</sup> “About Us” NSCIA website. Accessed at: <https://nscia.com.ng/> on 30 March 2026.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> For an interesting insight into strategies of an Islamic organization in Nigeria, see Bashir Abdullatif and Mohd Farid Mohd Sharif, “Leadership in Islam: Views, Methods, and Suggestions in the Nigerian Islamic Organization,” *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 10, no. 3 (2020): 174–182. DOI:10.6007/IJARBS/v10-i3/7036. Downloaded from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343674048\\_Leadership\\_in\\_Islam\\_Views\\_Methods\\_and\\_Suggestions\\_in\\_the\\_Nigerian\\_Islamic\\_Organization](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343674048_Leadership_in_Islam_Views_Methods_and_Suggestions_in_the_Nigerian_Islamic_Organization) on 30 March 2026. The authors provide a sharp critique of the shortcomings of the organization in Nigeria with recommendations for increasing effective impact. In the critique, one can glean the expectations for Islamic leadership in local, regional, and national affairs.

<sup>178</sup> For South Africa, MUSCOOSA (Muslim Supreme Council of South Africa) serves as the final authority (<https://muscoosa.org/> accessed on 30 March 2026).

cils for local engagement. For South Africa, the Western Province, with the largest population of Muslims, has the largest and most organized regional council, the Muslim Judicial Council (MJC).<sup>179</sup> Both Councils in South Africa have more than a dozen departments that cover numerous facets of religious and community life (i.e., *Halaal* certification, religious instruction, marriage counseling, cemetery boards). Councils, thus, serve as a pragmatic level of leadership that brings together other leaders into one structure to provide consensus.

In addition to more formal councils, one can identify consultative councils (*shura*) composed of scholars and community leaders that function more as an informal fraternal. For example, many locations<sup>180</sup> have a “League of Imams” designed to aid in cooperative work. In early 2026, a new League of Imams and Alfas in Yorubaland, Edo, and Delta states in Nigeria was launched<sup>181</sup> to “to strengthen the Muslim Ummah economically, politically, and educationally, while safeguarding the dignity, security, and collective interests of Yoruba Muslims.”<sup>182</sup> Such levels of coordination and organization demonstrate how councils of imams and scholars collaborate to issue guidance and represent Muslim communities.

#### *Judicial and Legal Leadership: Muftis and Qadis*

Islamic leadership is not limited to political or spiritual figures (such as caliphs or imams) but also includes legal authorities who interpret and apply the *Sharia* (Islamic law). Among the most significant are the *mufti*, who

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<sup>179</sup> The MJC while regional does have a broader influence as their statement of significance declares: “The MJC is a Muslim Judiciary whose main functions relate to religious guidance, education, Fatawa, Da’wah, Halaal certification and Social Development (especially marriage counselling). It is a Non-Profit Organization in a country where Muslims are a minority group... It is the most representative and influential Muslim religious organization in the Western Cape, recognized locally, nationally and internationally for the religious, cultural and organizational roles it plays in South Africa.” (<https://mjc.org.za/> accessed on 30 March 2026).

<sup>180</sup> A quick google search of “which countries have a ‘League of Imams’” reveals chapters in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mauritania, Mali, Nigeria just to name a few. Search conducted on 30 March 2026.

<sup>181</sup> “A New League of Imams, Alfas emerges in South-West” in Punchline online, 12 Feb 2026. Accessed at: <https://punchng.com/new-league-of-imams-alfas-emerges-in-south-west/> on 30 March 2026.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

issues *fatawa* (legal opinions), and the *qadi*, who oversees disputes. These roles reflect an important distinction within Islamic judicial leadership between *legal interpretation* and *judicial enforcement*. In other words, the *mufti* gives opinions on law and the *qadi* issues binding judgments on cases.

A *mufti* is a “jurist who articulated the law as a matter of scholarly interpretation, not as an act of state enforcement.”<sup>183</sup> He is a qualified Islamic jurist trained in *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) who provides legal interpretations of Islamic law. His primary function is to issue a *fatwa*, which is a formal legal opinion. While not an appointed official, he is expected to possess mastery of Islamic legal sources [the Qur’an, Hadith, Sunnah, consensus (*ijma*)], and analogical reasoning (*qiyās*), linguistic competence, and moral integrity as the issuing of a *fatwa* involves speaking on behalf of divine law.<sup>184</sup> A *fatwa* is defined as a non-binding legal opinion given in response to a specific question regarding Islamic law.<sup>185</sup> It is typically issued when individuals, judges, or communities seek guidance on religious, ethical, or legal matters. *Fatwas* address a wide range of issues, including ritual practice, finance, marriage, contemporary ethical dilemmas, social, or even political matters. Importantly, a *fatwa* is **advisory** rather than compulsory, meaning that it does not carry the binding force of a judicial ruling.<sup>186</sup> *Muftis*, therefore, usually serve as independent scholars who interpreted divine law for practical application in society

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<sup>183</sup> Wael B. Hallaq, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 107.

<sup>184</sup> One can find classical scholars that placed stringent requirements on the *mufti*. For example, Al-Nawawī (d. 1277) is one of the more quoted classic Islamic scholars whose primary work was published in 1988 with partial translations available on various cites [*Adab al-Fatwa wa al-Mufti wa al-Mustafti* (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1988)]. The title is roughly translated as “Rules of Conduct for Issuing *Fatwas*, for Issuers of *Fatwas*, and for Persons Requesting a *Fatwa*” and provides expectations for the qualification of a *mufti* as an issuer of *fatwas* that are foundational for later Islamic scholars. A partial translation by Mahmoud Haggag is available online: <https://doi.org/10.13109/hikm.2022.13.2.252>.

<sup>185</sup> “*Fatwa*.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Accessed at <https://www.britannica.com/topic/fatwa> on 30 March 2026. See also, Richard C. Martin, *Encyclopaedia of Islam and the Muslim World* (New York: MacMillan Reference USA, 2003) Accessed on 30 March 2026 at [https://openlibrary.org/books/OL15542019M/Encyclopedia\\_of\\_Islam\\_and\\_the\\_Muslim\\_world](https://openlibrary.org/books/OL15542019M/Encyclopedia_of_Islam_and_the_Muslim_world)

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

acting as a mediator between sacred texts and lived reality, translating general principles of Sharia into concrete guidance. Practically speaking, *muftis* often advise judges (*qadis*) on complex legal questions and help address new or unprecedented issues not explicitly covered in foundational texts. It should be noted, however, that “the development of civil codes in most Islamic countries, however, has tended to restrict the authority of *muftis* to cases involving personal status and religious custom, such as inheritance, marriage, and divorce.”<sup>187</sup>

A *qadi* is a judge appointed to administer justice according to Islamic law. According to tradition, “The second caliph, ‘Umar I, is said to have been the first to appoint a *qadi* to eliminate the necessity of his personally judging every dispute that arose in the community. Thereafter, it was considered a religious duty for authorities to provide for the administration of justice through the appointment of *qadis*.”<sup>188</sup> The *qadi* embodies the **practical** application of Sharia. While the “*qadi*’s jurisdiction theoretically includes civil as well as criminal matters, in modern states, *qadis* generally hear only cases related to personal status and religious custom.”<sup>189</sup> Such cases can involve family law (i.e., marriage, divorce, guardianship), contracts, inheritance, and civil and commercial disputes. The rulings are enforceable and usually recognized by the state or governing authority. In South Africa, for example, the Muslim Supreme Council of South Africa includes a structured system of *muftis* and *qadis* operating within a national administrative framework highlighting enforceable laws. In summary, the relationship between *muftis* and *qadis* illustrates a dual structure in Islamic law: *muftis* interpret the law (legal theory and advisory opinions), and *qadis* apply the law (court judgments and enforcement).

## Leadership Styles in Islam

With an understanding of the layers of both religious and judicial leadership structures within Islam, one can draw some conclusions as to the expected styles of leadership. Three descriptions of Islamic leadership

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<sup>187</sup> “*Mufti*.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

<sup>188</sup> “*Qadi*.” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*.

style to be practiced are noted. First, one of the most defining features is the expectation of *consultative leadership* (*Shuria*). The Qur'an commands consultation: "consult them in the affairs. Then when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah..." (Qur'an 3:159); "...those who answer the Call of their Lord...and who conduct their affairs by mutual consultation..." (Qur'an 42:38). Rizaldy and Hidayatullah, reflecting on these verses conclude that "*shura* is placed among the main obligations in Islam, namely prayer (*shalat*) and obligatory alms (*zakat*), this shows the importance of Shura's position in Islam."<sup>190</sup> They continue:

There are three reasons for a leader not to apply the principles of shura in making decisions. First, there is self-interest so that the voting rights of others are overlooked. Second, the leader feels himself superior to others and looks down on the abilities of others. Third, there is an emergency condition that requires an immediate decision and makes shura impossible. Only the third condition is acceptable in an Islamic perspective, while the first and second reasons are despicable attitudes.<sup>191</sup>

*Shura* functions as a participatory model that ensures inclusion and communal accountability. A second style Islamic leadership strongly emphasizes is *servanthood* that embodies humility and service. "The Prophet Muhammad emphasized this in his leadership, often saying, 'The leader of a people is their servant.'"<sup>192</sup> This aligns with broader Islamic ethics of compassion, justice (*adl*), and stewardship, positioning leadership as service rather than domination which leads to the third style of leadership promoted within Muslim communities: ethical-moral leadership. Leadership style is to be "character" driven by such moral virtues as justice, trustworthiness, patience, and humility and compassion. These qual-

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<sup>190</sup> Muhamad Rizky Rizaldy and Maulana Syarif Hidayatullah, "Islamic Leadership Values: A Conceptual Study," *Dialogia* 19, no. 1 (2021), p. 100. Downloaded on 30 March 2026 from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352786420\\_Islamic\\_Leadership\\_Values\\_A\\_Conceptual\\_Study](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/352786420_Islamic_Leadership_Values_A_Conceptual_Study)

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Islamic Brains, "Islamic Leadership" online at <https://www.islamicbrains.com/2024/09/islamic-leadership.html> accessed on 30 March 2026.

ities are modeled on the prophets, who are regarded as the highest exemplars of leadership.<sup>193</sup> It should be noted, however, that these qualities are directed to the Muslim community and are not necessarily seen as applicable to the non-Muslim living in or near that community.

## **Baptists and Islam**

Rodgers provides valuable insight into the acceptance of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa:<sup>194</sup>

While syncretism is rampant and Folk Islam is the norm, there is perhaps a deeper reason these two religious systems can co-exist so interchangeably: despite looking very different from the outside, Islam and African Traditional Religion have many of the same values. When Christianity arrived on the continent there were large-scale calls for reform. Forsaking idol worship, polygamy, and any other cultural norms that were contra-biblical were all expectations for the new convert to Christ. However, this was not the case in Islam which was much more compatible and accepting of almost all these practices.

Rodgers also notes particular aspects of belief—such as an understanding of a god that is uninvolved in with his creation, but of a spirit world that is involved and causes trouble;<sup>195</sup> the ritualistic nature of faith that focuses on the “right practice of rituals”;<sup>196</sup> and also about

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<sup>193</sup> Islamic Brains argues that “adherence to Justice and Fairness” is the highest core principle of Islamic Leadership (Ibid.). He goes on to note the remaining five principles: consultation, accountability, compassion and mercy, trustworthiness, and respect for rights.

<sup>194</sup> Rodgers, *Introduction*, p. 33.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid. Rodgers speaks of the evidence of syncretism over these ideas as the fact that in every pharmacy in Niamey, Niger, one can find “powders to fight off evil spirits. This bottle of powder is said to have been blessed and produced in the Arab world and endorsed by a well-known Islamic teacher.” (Ibid.)

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

the perception of authority.<sup>197</sup> While the official tenets of Islam portray Islamic leadership as cooperative, focused on justice, and engaging in communities, in practice, one experiences a more rigid form of leadership. The role of Arabic adds to the mystery of leadership as well as establishing the distinction of “real leaders”: “Since the majority of Muslims worldwide do not speak Arabic fluently, their knowledge of their faith and even their holy book is largely dependent on their imam (read Big Man). Whatever he says goes, no questions asked.”<sup>198</sup>

### *Bridges for Gospel Engagement*

While significant differences in leadership structures exist between Islamic leadership and Baptists, some shared themes emerge that can provide foundation for productive conversation. First, and most importantly, is the acceptance of divine authority as the highest authority. Further, the understanding of divine revelation is a critical point of contact. Even further, the reality that this divine revelation expresses some form of law or teaching that is to be obeyed by the faithful is common to both. This conviction does allow for some conversation but does emphasize the need for one to speak from Scripture as much as possible. Secondly, an integration of faith and community engagement is common ground. There exists in both Islam and Christianity an expectation of charitable activities. Leadership, then, is not merely administrative, but also understood as moral and communal in practice and expected to shape belief and behavior. Faith that has no expression in life is understood to be false by both groups. Such activity is often expressed in terms of justice, morality, or accountability. Third, both Baptists and Muslims worship and serve in fairly decentralized structures. The vague hierarchical structure of Islam gives way to the local mosque for most Muslims. It is the local context that holds sway. This provides opportunity to find dialogue partners who are more open depending on which mosque they attend. Finally, the high regard for education and scholarship is found in both traditions. This reality

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 34. The idea that there is a “Big Man” who knows spiritual truths and is to be obeyed makes sense in the African worldview.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

does mean that subjects like apologetics are often of great value as one must be able to defend beliefs.

### *Barriers to Gospel Engagement*

The syncretization of “folk Islam” does present a difficulty as one cannot assume that a Muslim encountered has a good grasp on Islamic teaching. Similarly, local leaders may not be well-versed and only repeat what has been given. This reality creates difficulty in having genuine engagement. Similarly, the lack of centralized authority which can be beneficial can also be a detriment as the application of leadership and form of practice can vary from community to community. One cannot assume a sameness across every Muslim community—even in the same city. Because of this reality, wide variations in the interpretation of Sharia are noted from community to community and country to country. Finally, just as tensions exist in Islam between traditional, scholarly, and political leadership, the true nature of leadership within a Muslim community can be difficult a for non-member to perceive accurately.

### *Conclusions*

In summary, Islamic leadership has as its **authority**, the Qur’an and Sharia. The **structure** is experienced as decentralized though with some hierarchical undertones. Nevertheless, there is a unified identity to the structure based on scholarly leadership. The **leadership style** can be characterized as legal and moral. The **accountability** for Islamic leadership is first, Allah, then the law, and finally the community. Islamic leadership presents a multidimensional model that integrates theology, law, ethics, and community participation. Its structures range historically from centralized authority (Caliphate) to decentralized scholarly leadership, while its styles emphasize consultation, service, and community.

## FINAL CONCLUSIONS

One can identify some points of agreement across all these traditions:

- *Recognition of a Transcendent Authority*: All these traditions affirm that leadership is ultimately accountable to a higher authority—God, divine law, or spiritual order.

- *Integration of Moral and Social Leadership:* Leadership is not merely administrative but moral and communal, shaping both belief and behavior.
- *Importance of Community:* Whether through congregations, *ummah*, or traditional societies, leadership is exercised within a communal context.

Nevertheless, one must understand the profound differences that exist. First, the understanding of where authority is located, leadership structures, dominant styles of leadership, and the nature of accountability vary greatly. The following table provides a comparison of key leadership dynamics between Baptists, Roman Catholic Church, Prosperity Gospel Churches, African Traditional Religions, and Islam:

| <b>Tradition</b>  | <b>Authority Source</b> | <b>Structure</b>        | <b>Leadership Style</b>    | <b>Accountability</b>   |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>Baptist</i>    | Scripture, congregation | Congregational          | Servant, participatory     | Scripture, congregation |
| <i>RCC</i>        | Apostolic succession    | Hierarchical            | Institutional, sacramental | Hierarchy               |
| <i>Prosperity</i> | Charisma, revelation    | Centralized hierarchy   | Visionary, directive       | Leader-centered         |
| <i>ATR</i>        | Tradition, ancestors    | Communal network        | Consultative, restorative  | Community/ancestors     |
| <i>Islam</i>      | Qur'an, Sharia          | Scholarly decentralized | Legal, moral               | Allah, law, community   |

*Figure 5: Table of Leadership Dynamics*

One should also recognize the varied traditions around the formation of leadership:

- Baptist: calling affirmed by congregation
- Catholic: formal ordination and hierarchy
- Prosperity: charismatic emergence
- ATR: cultural and spiritual recognition
- Islam: scholarly training

A comparison of varying leadership structures and styles provides an opportunity to consider some possible implications for Baptist churches regarding Church Administration in sub-Saharan Africa:

- *Affirm congregational integrity:* Baptist churches must maintain a commitment to congregational government and communal accountability to resist pressures toward personality-driven leadership.
- *Learn from communal models of leadership:* ATR and Islamic consultative practices highlight the importance of community participation, which can strengthen Baptist decision-making processes.
- *Guard against Charismatic Excess:* The rise of Prosperity leadership models underscores the need for robust accountability structures to prevent abuses of power.
- *Appreciate Institutional Strength:* The Catholic model demonstrates the value of organizational stability and long-term planning, areas where Baptist churches can grow.

The African religious landscape offers a variety of leadership models, each reflecting distinct theological commitments and cultural dynamics. Baptist leadership, with its emphasis on Scripture, congregational authority, and servant leadership, stands in an optimal place of contrast and dialogue to impact sub-Saharan Africa with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## ABOUT THE TABLE ON RITUAL SPECIALISTS

The table was compiled using Open AI/Chat GPT with the following two prompts: (1) Provide a list of the most commonly used titles for shamans in sub-Saharan Africa. Provide the title and people group or country with which they are associated; (2) expand this into an academic table with sources in Turabian style.

The following Observational Note was provided by Chat GPT: “While these figures are sometimes compared to “shamans” in academic literature, African religious specialists are typically embedded in communal, ancestral, and cosmological systems rather than the individual ecstatic practices often associated with Siberian or Central Asian shamanism. Their authority is usually socially recognized and often inherited or revealed through calling, illness, or initiation.”<sup>199</sup> Each title was then checked for accuracy. Some anomalies: Nganga and N’anga seem to be interchanged in some sources. Wadaad can refer to the writing system as well as individuals.

### *Definition of “primary functions”*

The following definitions were provided by Open AI/Chat GPT upon the generation of the table:

- **Diviner:** Found across many African societies. A general functional term for those who interpret spiritual causes of events.
- **Herbalist:** Widespread Specialists in medicinal plants, often working alongside diviners.
- **Spirit Medium:** Common in Central and Southern Africa. Individuals who become possessed by or channel spirits or ancestors.

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<sup>199</sup> <https://chatgpt.com/c/69c00afd-444c-8326-a76e-0ea15ad7fddc>

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## APPENDIX B

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### LEADING A CHURCH BUSINESS MEETING – A PRACTICAL GUIDE<sup>1</sup>

A church business meeting is a gathering of church members or leaders to discuss and decide on matters of church administration and ministry. These meetings are essential for keeping the congregation informed, making decisions that affect the church's direction, and fostering unity among members. However, without proper planning and leadership, meetings can become inefficient or contentious. This chapter provides a practical guide on how to lead a church business meeting from start to finish: setting the agenda and gathering information to conducting the meeting and adjourning it. We will also explore the role of the chairperson, the importance of parliamentary procedure, and tips for a successful meeting. By following these guidelines, church leaders can ensure that business meetings are productive, respectful, and focused on advancing the **Mission of God** through **His** church.<sup>2</sup>

#### PREPARING FOR THE MEETING

Effective preparation is the foundation of a successful church business meeting. By taking the time to plan, the chairperson can ensure that the

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<sup>1</sup> These notes are based on: H.M. Robert, *Robert's Rule of Order*, 12<sup>th</sup> Ed. (New York: Public Affairs, 2020); Godfrey Harold, *Church Administration Class Notes* (Cape Town Baptist Seminary: Unpublished, 2020); and the practical experiences of Prof Harold of the actual working of the Robert Rules over 34 years of ministerial experience and Church and denominational leadership.

<sup>2</sup> We are under- rowers not the Chief Captain... a good reminder is the section "The Church as an Organized Organism" in the chapter, *The Biblical Foundations of Administration*, above.

meeting runs smoothly and that all important topics are covered. There are several key steps in preparing for the meeting.

## Setting the Agenda

An agenda is a structured outline of the topics and order of business for the meeting. It helps guide the discussion and ensures that all essential items are addressed in a timely manner. When setting the agenda, the chairperson should consider the following:

- **Include Essential Items:** Every business meeting should include certain standard items, such as approval of the minutes from the previous meeting, reports from key leaders or committees, and financial updates. Other common agenda items might include announcements, new business proposals, and any unfinished items/matter arising from previous meetings.
- **Order of Items:** Arrange agenda items in a logical order that flows from opening to closing. A typical order is:
  1. Call to order
  2. Opening prayer and devotions
  3. Roll call or attendance
  4. Reading of correspondence if any (Not for discussion)
  5. Approval of minutes
  6. Reports (pastor, committee chairs, financial)
  7. Old business/matter arising from previous minutes (unfinished items)
  8. New business (proposed actions)
  9. Announcements
  10. Closing prayer

This sequence helps keep the meeting organized and ensures that important procedural steps (like approving minutes) are not overlooked.

- **Time Allocation:** Allocate a specific amount of time for each agenda item. This helps manage the meeting's pace and prevents any

one topic from monopolizing the session. For example, the chairperson might allocate 10 minutes for the financial report, 15 minutes for committee reports, and so on. It's important to be realistic about time needs – if a topic is likely to take longer, consider adding an extra few minutes or breaking it into multiple sessions.

- **Include Clear Objectives:** Each agenda item should have a clear purpose or objective stated in the agenda. This helps participants understand why the item is being discussed and what the expected outcome is. For instance, instead of simply listing “Finance Report,” the agenda might say “Finance Report – Review budget performance and upcoming expenses.”
- **Distribute in Advance:** Once the agenda is finalized, distribute it to all participants well in advance of the meeting. This allows members to review the topics, prepare any necessary reports or comments, and come to the meeting prepared. Sending the agenda ahead of time also sets expectations and helps prevent surprise items from being introduced.

By following these guidelines, the chairperson can create an agenda that is clear, comprehensive, and conducive to productive discussion. An example of a well-structured church business meeting agenda is provided below:

### **Gathering Necessary Information and Reports**

Before the meeting, the chairperson should collect all relevant information and reports that will be presented. This step ensures that presenters have the materials they need and that the meeting can proceed without delay. Key steps include:

- **Review Minutes and Documents:** If applicable, review the minutes from the previous meeting to familiarize yourself with any unfinished business or action items that need to be addressed. Also gather any reports, financial statements, or committee updates that are due for discussion. For example, if the finance committee has a report on the budget, make sure to obtain that report and any supporting documents.

- **Prepare Handouts:** For important agenda items, prepare handouts or visual aids. This could include printed copies of financial reports, committee reports, or any proposals that will be discussed. Providing handouts helps participants follow along and ensures everyone has the same information. It's also a professional touch that demonstrates thorough preparation.
- **Consult with Presenters:** If committee chairs or leaders are presenting reports, meet with them beforehand to go over the content and any questions that might arise. This is especially important for complex or controversial topics. Knowing the “ins and outs” of each motion or report will help the chairperson facilitate the discussion and answer questions effectively.
- **Verify Necessary Documents:** Ensure that any documents that need to be approved or acted upon are available. For instance, if a motion to hire a new staff member is on the agenda, have the job description and any relevant background information ready. If financial items are on the agenda, have the budget and expense reports available. Being fully prepared means the meeting can address these items efficiently without last-minute scrambling.
- By gathering information and reports in advance, the chairperson sets the stage for a smooth meeting. It allows presenters to deliver their reports with confidence and ensures that all necessary data is at hand for discussion and decision-making.

## **Notifying the Community and Ensuring Quorum**

Before the meeting, it's important to notify the church community about the upcoming business meeting. This ensures that members have sufficient notice and can plan to attend. Key notification steps include:

- **Announce in Advance:** Publicize the meeting date, time, and location (and agenda, if available) through multiple channels. This might include the church bulletin, email newsletter, social media posts, and announcements during worship services. By giving several days' notice, members can mark the date on their calendars and decide to attend. Informing members ahead of time also

shows that the church is organized and transparent, rather than secretive. The constitution of the local church will give guidance to the lead time that must be given before a meeting is held.

- **Check Attendance and Quorum:** In many church governance structures, a quorum (a minimum number of members) is required to conduct official business. Before the meeting, the chairperson or secretary should check the attendance list. If the number of attendees is likely to be close to or below the quorum threshold, consider rescheduling the meeting or taking steps to encourage more members to attend. If a quorum is not met, the meeting may not be able to make any binding decisions. Ensuring a quorum is an important part of preparation, as it maintains the legitimacy of the meeting. The constitution of the church will give guidance as to the number of members in attendance needed to make up the quorum to constitute a meeting.
- **Provide Meeting Details:** Along with the date and time, include information about the meeting's purpose and what to expect. For example, you might note that the meeting will cover financial reports, committee updates, and any new business proposals. If there are special items (such as an election or a vote on a major policy), highlight those as well. Clear communication sets the right expectations and helps members decide whether they need to prepare specific questions or concerns.
- **Follow Up:** After initial announcements, consider sending reminders closer to the meeting. This can be a brief email or another announcement that reiterates the date, time, and agenda. If possible, have the secretary or a volunteer take attendance at the start of the meeting to confirm who is present. By being proactive in notification and attendance management, the chairperson helps ensure that the meeting has the participation and authority needed to conduct church business effectively.

In summary, thorough preparation—including setting a clear agenda, gathering necessary information, and notifying the congregation—is crucial for a successful church business meeting. By investing time in these

preparatory steps, the chairperson can create a solid foundation for an efficient and productive meeting.

## CONDUCTING THE MEETING

Once the meeting is called to order, the chairperson's role shifts to guiding the discussion and ensuring that the meeting proceeds in an orderly and respectful manner. The following steps outline how to conduct a church business meeting.

### Calling the Meeting to Order and Establishing Procedures

The meeting begins with a formal call to order. The chairperson should:

- **Welcome Participants:** Greet those in attendance and thank them for coming. If it's an annual meeting or a special meeting, you might note the occasion. For example, "Good morning, everyone. Thank you for joining us for this church business meeting."
- **Open with Prayer:** It's customary to start the meeting with a prayer or devotional to set a spiritual tone. The chairperson can lead a short prayer or invite someone else (such as the pastor or a leader) to offer a prayer. This helps focus the gathering on God's presence and purpose.
- **Announce the Meeting is Called to Order:** Clearly state that the meeting is now in session. If applicable, mention the date, time, and the fact that it is a regular or special business meeting. For instance, "I now call this church business meeting to order, on [date] at [time]."
- **Review the Agenda:** Briefly go over the agenda items to ensure everyone knows what will be discussed. You might say, "We have an agenda today that includes approving minutes from the last meeting, reports from the pastor and committees, financial updates, old business/matters arising, new business, and closing announcements." This review serves as a reminder of the meeting's structure and helps participants follow along.

- **Establish Quorum:** Before proceeding with business, confirm that a quorum is present. The chairperson or secretary can take a roll call or simply observe who is in attendance. If a quorum is not present, it may be necessary to adjourn the meeting or continue it at a later time. If a quorum is present, you can state, “I declare that a quorum is present and the meeting is ready to proceed.”
- **Set Ground Rules:** If it’s the first meeting or if there are new members present, briefly outline any ground rules for discussion. For example, remind everyone to listen respectfully, to speak one at a time, and to keep comments relevant to the agenda. Emphasize that this is a business meeting but also a spiritual gathering – encourage participants to approach it with seriousness and grace.

By starting the meeting with a prayer and a clear statement of purpose, the chairperson sets a positive tone and ensures that the meeting begins on the right foot. This initial phase helps focus everyone’s attention and establishes the proper procedure for the session.

## **Presenting Reports and Discussing Agenda Items**

With the meeting underway, the next step is to address the agenda items in order. This typically involves reports from key leaders or committees, followed by discussion of each item. Here’s how to handle this part:

- **Approval of Minutes:** One of the initial agenda items is usually the approval of the minutes from the previous meeting. The secretary or a designated person should read the minutes aloud or distribute them. The chairperson will then ask if there are any corrections or additions to the minutes. If no changes are needed, a motion is made to approve the minutes as read. Once seconded, the motion is put to a vote. The chairperson should ensure that the vote is conducted fairly (using a show of hands or a roll call) and announce the result. If there are changes, they should be noted and approved accordingly. Approving the minutes confirms that the previous meeting’s discussions and decisions are accurately recorded and accepted by the group.

- **Pastor's Report:** Next, the pastor (or lead pastor) will typically give a report on the spiritual and administrative state of the church. The pastor may cover topics such as recent sermons, upcoming events, ministry updates, and any pastoral concerns. The chairperson should introduce the pastor and invite them to speak. During the pastor's report, the chairperson can encourage members to ask questions or provide feedback if appropriate. It's important to allocate enough time for the pastor's report (as indicated on the agenda) so that they can address all relevant points without rushing. If the pastor has any reports or announcements, this is the time to share them.
- **Committee Reports:** Many church business meetings include reports from various committees (e.g., finance, outreach, missions, worship, property, etc.). The chairperson will introduce each committee chairperson in turn. Each chairperson will then present a brief report on the committee's activities since the last meeting. This might include progress on ongoing projects, any challenges or needs the committee is facing, and upcoming plans. The chairperson should allow each report to be given without interruption (unless a question is asked). After each report, the chairperson may invite questions or discussion from the floor. If a committee has a specific proposal or motion to present, this is the time to do so (the proposal will then be moved under "New Business").
- **Financial Report:** A financial update is usually an important agenda item. The treasurer or finance committee chairperson will present the church's financial status. This typically includes a summary of income and expenses, any significant financial highlights or issues, and an overview of the budget. The financial report should be presented clearly and transparently. The chairperson should ensure that the report is understandable to all members, possibly by using charts or graphs if available. After the report, the floor can be opened for questions or discussion about finances. The chairperson should encourage members to ask for clarification or express concerns about the financial health of the church. It's important to note that financial matters often require careful

consideration, so the chairperson may need to allocate additional time if the discussion is lengthy.

- **Old Business/ Matters Arising (Unfinished Items):** Old business refers to any items from previous meetings that were not resolved or did not receive final action. The chairperson will review any pending items and call for a motion to take up that business. For example, if the previous meeting tabled a decision on a new ministry program, the chairperson might say, “We have an item from the last meeting that we tabled: the proposal to launch a community outreach program. Is there a motion to take this up now?” Once the motion to consider old business is made and seconded, the discussion can proceed. It’s important to handle old business carefully – the chairperson should briefly summarize the issue and then facilitate discussion or vote. If there is a proposal or a decision still needed, the chairperson will ensure that a motion is made and that the appropriate vote is taken. Once an old business item is resolved or determined, it is no longer on the agenda.
- **New Business (Proposed Actions):** New business includes any new proposals, motions, or concerns that are being introduced at this meeting. The chairperson will announce that new business is being considered. Members can then raise their hands to speak and present a motion or idea. The chairperson will recognize the member who has a motion. When a member presents a motion, they should state it clearly. For example, “I move that we approve the budget for the next fiscal year.” The chairperson will then restate the motion to ensure everyone understands it. The chairperson will then ask for a second to the motion. If someone seconds the motion (meaning they agree that it should be considered), the motion is now before the assembly. The chairperson will then call for discussion on the motion. Members can speak in favor of or against the motion, and the chairperson will moderate the discussion. The chairperson should encourage respectful debate and ensure that all relevant points are heard. Once discussion is complete, the chairperson will put the motion to a vote. The chairperson will state the motion again and ask for a vote (e.g., “All in fa-

vor of the motion to approve the budget, say ‘Yes.’ All opposed, say ‘No.’”). The chairperson will then announce the result of the vote. If the motion passes, the chairperson will record the decision. If it fails, the matter is closed. It’s important to note that the chairperson should remain neutral and let the vote determine the outcome. The chairperson may have the authority to vote, but they typically do so only to break a tie or in certain procedural roles. Throughout this process, the chairperson should follow parliamentary procedure rules to ensure fairness and order.

By systematically addressing each agenda item – from minutes and reports to old and new business – the chairperson ensures that the meeting stays on track and that all important matters are discussed. It’s essential to maintain a respectful and orderly atmosphere during discussion. The chairperson should encourage participation from members but also ensure that no one dominates the conversation. If a discussion becomes heated or off-topic, the chairperson can gently steer it back to the agenda item at hand. Throughout this section, the chairperson’s role is to facilitate the discussion, ask clarifying questions when needed, and make sure that decisions are made in an informed and orderly manner.

## **Taking Votes and Making Decisions**

Making decisions is a central part of a church business meeting. The chairperson must ensure that votes are taken fairly and that the will of the majority (or the required quorum or majority as defined by the church’s bylaws) is respected. Here are the key steps for taking votes and making decisions:

- **Clarify the Vote Requirement:** Before any vote is taken, the chairperson should make sure that everyone understands what type of vote is needed. This could be a simple majority (more than half of those present and voting), a two-thirds majority, or a unanimous vote, depending on the matter at hand and the church’s bylaws. For example, amending the church’s bylaws might require a two-thirds vote, while approving a routine budget item might only need a majority. If there are any special rules (such as a quorum requirement for a particular vote), those should be stated

clearly. If the church follows Robert's Rules of Order, the appropriate voting requirements for common motions are as follows:

- **Conduct the Vote:** When the time comes to vote, the chairperson will state the question clearly. For example, "All in favor of the motion to approve the budget, say 'Yes.' All opposed, say 'No.'" or there might be a show of hands. The chairperson will then wait a few seconds for everyone to respond. If it's a show of hands, the chairperson will count the hands. If it's a roll call, the secretary will call off names. The chairperson should remain neutral and not influence the vote (except in certain cases like breaking a tie). It's important to ensure that only those present and eligible to vote do so. If a member abstains, that is noted but does not count as a vote for either side.
- **Announce the Result:** After the vote is taken, the chairperson will announce the result. For example, "The motion is carried by a vote of [number] in favor to [number] opposed." If the motion fails, the chairperson will say, "The motion is lost." It's crucial to be clear and accurate in the announcement. If there is any confusion or if a recount is requested, the chairperson should address it promptly.
- **Handle Ties or Special Situations:** In the event of a tie vote, the chairperson may have the casting vote (depending on the church's bylaws or parliamentary procedure rules). If the chairperson is to vote, they should do so only to break the tie. If the bylaws do not give the chair a casting vote, a tie means the motion fails. In some cases, especially for controversial decisions, a second vote may be taken if the chairperson deems it necessary. Additionally, if a vote is tied and the matter is something that requires a specific majority (e.g., two-thirds), the chairperson will announce that the required majority was not achieved.
- **Document Decisions:** Once a decision is made, the chairperson should ensure that it is recorded. This may involve updating the minutes to reflect the decision. The secretary will note the outcome of each vote in the minutes. For example, "Motion to approve the budget carried by a vote of 25 in favor, 10 opposed."

The chairperson should review the minutes after the meeting to confirm that decisions are accurately recorded.

- **Resolve Differences Respectfully:** If there is strong disagreement on a motion, the chairperson should encourage the members to express their concerns but also remind everyone to maintain respect for the decision. It's important to follow through on decisions made – if a motion is approved, the church will move forward with that decision, and if it's not, the matter is set aside (unless it's revisited later). The chairperson should emphasize that decisions made in the meeting are binding on the church, at least until changed by a subsequent meeting. By handling votes fairly and professionally, the chairperson helps maintain the integrity of the decision-making process and keeps the meeting on track.

Taking votes and making decisions requires careful attention to procedure. The chairperson's role is to ensure that the process is transparent and that the will of the majority is respected. In cases where there are multiple motions or amendments, the chairperson should handle them in an orderly manner, possibly moving from the most important to the least or addressing amendments to a main motion before voting on the main motion. Throughout this process, the chairperson should also be prepared to clarify any questions about the vote or to consult parliamentary procedure rules if needed. By following these steps, the chairperson can lead the meeting through the decision-making phase efficiently and with integrity.

### **Handling Unfinished Business and New Business**

As mentioned above, the meeting should address any old business first, followed by new business. The chairperson will typically go through these in sequence. After a motion is voted on and resolved (whether it passes or fails), the chairperson will move to the next agenda item. It's important to ensure that all items are addressed or acknowledged:

- **Old Business/Matter Arising:** If a motion was tabled or postponed in a previous meeting, the chairperson will bring it back up now. The chairperson will ensure that the issue is either resolved or further discussed. If an old business item was not fully resolved, the chairperson may decide to table it again or take further

action. The key is to close out any pending items from prior meetings so that nothing is left hanging. If a decision was made in the previous meeting but not recorded, the chairperson will make sure it is noted in the minutes.

- **New Business Handling:** After old business/ matters arising, the chairperson will open the floor for new business. Members can propose new motions or raise new concerns. The chairperson will recognize each member who has a new idea. For each new proposal, the same procedure as above applies: the member will make a motion, the chairperson will restate it, ask for a second, facilitate discussion, and then put it to a vote. The chairperson should keep track of the time and ensure that no one item monopolizes too much time. If multiple new business items come up, the chairperson may prioritize them (for example, handling the most urgent or important items first). It's also acceptable to table a new business item if it requires more information or if the meeting time is running short – the chairperson can say, “This item is tabled until our next meeting.”
- **Announcements:** After all formal business is completed, the chairperson will open the floor for any announcements. This is a chance for members to share news, upcoming events, or personal prayer requests. The chairperson should encourage members to use this time to connect with one another. It's a more informal part of the meeting, but it helps maintain a sense of community. The chairperson should keep this segment brief to avoid extending the meeting beyond its scheduled time.

By methodically addressing old business and new business, the chairperson ensures that all matters are either resolved or acknowledged. This process helps maintain the continuity of leadership and ensures that no issues are overlooked. It also prevents old problems from resurfacing in subsequent meetings because they were not properly handled. Throughout this part of the meeting, the chairperson should remain vigilant about time and keep the discussion focused. If a discussion on a new item is taking too long, the chairperson can gently bring it to a close or

table it for later. The goal is to make the meeting as efficient as possible while still addressing all necessary items.

### **Adjourning the Meeting**

After all agenda items have been addressed and any announcements are made, the meeting is ready to be adjourned. The chairperson will:

- **Thank Participants:** Express appreciation to those who attended and participated in the meeting. This can be as simple as saying, “Thank you all for your time and contributions today. We’ve covered a lot of ground and made some important decisions.”
- **Close with Prayer:** Just as the meeting began with prayer, it’s customary to close with a closing prayer. The chairperson can lead a closing prayer or invite someone else to do so. This provides an opportunity to thank God for guiding the meeting and to ask for His continued blessing on the church’s work. It also signals the end of the formal meeting.
- **Announce the Meeting is Adjourned:** After the prayer, the chairperson will announce that the meeting is adjourned. For example, “I now declare this church business meeting adjourned. The next meeting will be held on [date] at [time].” If it’s a special meeting, the chairperson will indicate that it is a one-time meeting. It’s important to specify the date and time of the next meeting if applicable, to help members plan.
- **Sign Minutes and Distribute:** The secretary will provide the chairperson with the minutes for approval. The chairperson will review the minutes and sign them as the presiding officer. The secretary will then distribute the signed minutes to the appropriate parties (e.g., members, leaders) as needed. This ensures that the decisions and discussions of the meeting are documented and available for reference.

By closing the meeting with a prayer and a clear announcement, the chairperson signals that the formal business has concluded. This gives members a sense of closure and reassurance that the meeting has served

its purpose. Adjourning properly also helps maintain the decorum and respect of the gathering. It's important to leave the meeting on a positive note, reinforcing the unity and purpose of the church community.

## **The Role of the Chairperson**

The chairperson is the leader of the church business meeting and plays a pivotal role in its success. The chairperson's responsibilities include facilitating the meeting, ensuring order and fairness, and guiding the discussion toward decisions. The key aspects of the chairperson's role include:

- **Presiding Officer:** The chairperson is the presiding officer of the meeting. This means they oversee conducting the meeting in accordance with the agenda and the church's rules. The chairperson's word is final on procedural matters, but they should always strive for fairness and transparency. They are responsible for maintaining order, recognizing speakers, and ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to be heard in an orderly fashion.
- **Facilitator of Discussion:** One of the chairperson's main roles is to facilitate discussion. This involves guiding the conversation, asking questions to clarify points, and keeping the discussion on track. The chairperson should encourage participation from all members and ensure that no one dominates the discussion. If a member makes a point that is off-topic or repetitive, the chairperson can gently steer the conversation back to the agenda item. The chairperson should also ensure that everyone has a chance to speak – they can call on members by name or invite questions from the floor. By facilitating discussion effectively, the chairperson helps the group arrive at informed decisions.
- **Timekeeper:** The chairperson is responsible for managing the time of the meeting. They should adhere to the time limits set for each agenda item and keep the meeting from running too long. If a discussion on a particular item is getting too lengthy, the chairperson may need to cut it short or table it for further discussion. By keeping an eye on the clock, the chairperson ensures that the meeting stays on schedule and that all items are addressed. If nec-

essary, the chairperson can announce, “We have [X] minutes left, so let’s focus on the key points of this discussion.”

- **Parliamentary Expertise:** A good chairperson should be familiar with parliamentary procedure and use it to maintain order and fairness. This means knowing how to handle motions, amendments, votes, and other procedural points. If a member raises a point of order or a question about procedure, the chairperson should be able to answer or rule on it. While not every church requires the use of Robert’s Rules of Order, many do, so the chairperson should be prepared to apply the appropriate rules. Having a basic understanding of parliamentary procedure helps the chairperson avoid confusion and ensures that the meeting follows an orderly process.
- **Decision-Maker and Moderator:** In addition to facilitating, the chairperson often needs to make decisions on procedural matters. For example, the chairperson will decide who gets to speak next, whether a motion is in order, and how to handle a tie vote. The chairperson should make these decisions fairly and in accordance with the rules. They should also moderate the discussion to keep it respectful and focused. If emotions run high or if there is a disagreement, the chairperson may need to step in to calm the situation and ensure that everyone is heard without rancor. The chairperson should model the kind of behavior they expect from others – patience, respect, and a willingness to listen to differing views.
- **Leader of the Church Body:** Beyond the mechanics of the meeting, the chairperson represents the leadership of the church in the meeting. They should embody the church’s values and mission. This means setting a positive tone, emphasizing unity, and reminding members that the meeting is a spiritual gathering as well as a business meeting. The chairperson should encourage members to approach the meeting with prayerful consideration and to work together for the common good. In essence, the chairperson is not just a facilitator but also a leader who sets the example for the group.

- **Preparer and Organizer:** As discussed earlier, the chairperson plays a crucial role in preparing for the meeting. They are responsible for creating the agenda, gathering information, and ensuring that all necessary materials are available. The chairperson should also communicate with other leaders (pastor, committee chairs, etc.) to ensure everyone is prepared. This preparation is an extension of the chairperson's leadership role, showing that they are organized and committed to the meeting's success.
- **Follow-Up:** After the meeting, the chairperson's role doesn't end. They are responsible for following up on any action items or decisions made. This might involve assigning tasks to committee members, ensuring that minutes are recorded and distributed, and keeping the congregation informed of the meeting's outcomes. The chairperson should also prepare for the next meeting by planning the agenda and notifying members in advance. By being proactive in follow-up, the chairperson helps ensure that the meeting's decisions are implemented and that the church continues to move forward effectively.

In summary, the chairperson is the conductor of the church business meeting. They must be prepared, organized, and skilled in both content and process. A good chairperson knows how to balance structure with flexibility, ensuring that the meeting is productive and respectful. By fulfilling their role effectively, the chairperson can help the church community make decisions in a unified and orderly manner, moving the church's ministry forward with purpose.

## PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE AND MEETING RULES

Parliamentary procedure refers to the set of rules and practices used to conduct meetings in an orderly and fair manner. Many churches adopt a parliamentary system to govern their membership meetings, as it provides a clear framework for discussion, debate, and decision-making. The most used parliamentary authority is **Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised 12<sup>th</sup> Edition**, although other systems (such as the simpler parliamentary procedure outlined in Robert's Rules of Order for Small

Meetings or alternative methods like consensus decision-making) can also be used. Here's an overview of key parliamentary procedure concepts and how they apply to a church business meeting:

- **Motions:** A motion is a formal proposal made by a member to take a specific action or decide. For example, "I move that we approve the budget for the next fiscal year." All decisions in a meeting are made by motions. Every motion must be seconded by another member before it can be discussed. The chairperson will then state the motion and open it for discussion. After discussion, the motion is put to a vote. Understanding motions is crucial for conducting meetings – members should know how to make a motion, how to second it, and how to respond to a motion (for or against).
- **Amendments:** An amendment is a proposal to change or modify an existing motion. For instance, if a motion is to approve the budget, someone might propose an amendment to increase a particular expense. Amendments must also be seconded and can be debated. The chairperson will typically vote on amendments before the main motion. If an amendment is adopted, it becomes part of the motion; if not, the original motion remains. It's important to handle amendments in an orderly way, usually in the order they were proposed.
- **Order of Business:** Parliamentary procedure establishes an order of business for meetings. This is similar to the agenda we discussed earlier—it outlines the sequence in which items are addressed. Items like approval of minutes, reports, old business, new business, and closing are all part of the standard order. Following this order helps ensure that no important items are skipped and that the meeting proceeds in a logical flow.
- **Recognition and Speaking:** Under parliamentary procedure, the chairperson has the authority to recognize members to speak. A member who wishes to speak must usually raise their hand and wait to be recognized by the chairperson. The chairperson will then call on that member. Only one person can speak at a time, and the chairperson will alternate recognition fairly

among members. This ensures that everyone has a chance to be heard without interruptions.

- **Points of Order:** A point of order is a formal objection raised by a member about a procedural matter during the meeting. For example, a member might say, “I rise to a point of order: the motion is out of order because it wasn’t seconded.” The chairperson will then rule on the point of order. If the chairperson sustains the point of order, the motion or action in question is invalid. If the point of order is overruled, the discussion or action continues. Points of order help maintain the rules and ensure that the meeting is conducted properly.
- **Debate and Discussion:** Parliamentary procedure allows for discussion and debate on motions, but there are rules about how debate is conducted. Typically, members may speak to a motion, but the chairperson controls the debate. Members should address the chairperson when speaking and avoid interrupting each other. The chairperson can also limit the time each member speaks or the number of times a member can speak on a motion. The goal is to have an orderly discussion where all relevant points are heard but the meeting doesn’t become overly chaotic.
- **Voting:** As discussed earlier, motions require a vote to be decided. Parliamentary procedure defines different types of votes (majority, two-thirds, etc.) and how votes are taken (show of hands, voice vote, roll call). The chairperson will announce the required vote and then conduct the vote fairly. The chairperson will also announce the result of the vote clearly. It’s important to follow the rules for voting to ensure fairness – for example, a majority vote means more than half of those present and voting; a two-thirds vote means two-thirds of those present and voting. Abstentions are generally not counted as votes unless specified otherwise.
- **Adjournment:** The final action in a meeting is adjournment. The procedure for adjournment is simple – a member makes a motion to adjourn, which is then seconded and voted on. If approved, the meeting is adjourned. Some meetings may have an

adjournment motion even if no other business is pending, to signal the end of the meeting.

- **Consensus and Alternative Methods:** While Robert's Rules is widely used, not all churches require strict adherence to it. Some churches opt for a consensus decision-making process, where members seek to reach agreement without formal voting. In such cases, the chairperson will facilitate discussion until a consensus is reached. This can be a more collaborative approach but may require additional time and patience. It's important to note that if a church has adopted a specific parliamentary procedure (like Robert's Rules) in its bylaws, that procedure should be followed. If no procedure is specified, the chairperson can use Robert's Rules or another method, but it's wise to have some agreed-upon rules to avoid confusion.

By familiarizing themselves with parliamentary procedure, the chairperson can lead the meeting in a more structured and fair manner. Even if a church doesn't strictly use Robert's Rules, having a basic understanding of these principles helps in keeping meetings orderly. For example, knowing how to handle a motion, how to make a point of order, or how to call for a vote can prevent common issues like long-winded discussions or misunderstandings. Many churches also provide training or resources on parliamentary procedure for their leaders and members, which can be very helpful in conducting effective meetings. In summary, parliamentary procedure is an essential tool for any church business meeting, as it provides a framework for order, fairness, and efficient decision-making.

## TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL MEETING

Leading a church business meeting effectively requires more than just following a set agenda – it also involves skillful leadership and a focus on the church's mission. Here are some practical tips to help ensure that your church business meetings are productive, respectful, and aligned with the church's vision:

- **Set Clear Objectives:** Every meeting should have a clear purpose. Before calling a meeting, ask, "What do we hope to accomplish today?" If there is no clear objective, consider whether the meeting is

necessary at all. If the meeting is called just to have a gathering, be transparent about that purpose. However, if the goal is to make decisions or solve problems, ensure that the agenda and discussion are focused on achieving that goal. Knowing the objective will help the chairperson and participants stay on track and avoid tangents.

- **Use an Agenda and Stick to It:** As discussed, a well-structured agenda is crucial. Stick to the agenda as much as possible but also be flexible enough to address urgent issues that arise. A common pitfall is letting one topic dominate the meeting, which can lead to other important items being rushed or skipped. By having a clear agenda and time limits, the chairperson can keep the meeting moving forward. If a discussion goes off-topic, the chairperson can gently refocus it or note that the item will be saved for a future meeting. Remember, an agenda is a guide, not a straitjacket.
- **Prepare and Send the Agenda in Advance:** Always provide the agenda to participants before the meeting. This allows members to prepare their input and come to the meeting ready. It also shows respect for their time. Ideally, send the agenda at least a day or two in advance. If possible, include a brief description of each item and any relevant documents or reports. When the meeting begins, the chairperson can quickly go over the agenda to ensure everyone is on the same page. Having a prepared agenda sets the tone for an efficient meeting.
- **Start and End on Time:** Punctuality is important in any meeting. Start the meeting at the scheduled time, even if a few members are late. This shows respect for everyone's time and sets a precedent for punctuality. Likewise, if the meeting is scheduled for a specific duration, try to finish on time. If it's clear that the meeting will run over, communicate that to participants and adjust the agenda accordingly (for example, you might need to cut short some discussions or move an item to a future meeting). Ending on time also reinforces the idea that the meeting is efficient and that members' time is valued.
- **Keep Meetings Short:** Long meetings can be exhausting and less effective. Aim to keep the meeting as short as possible while still

addressing all necessary items. A good rule of thumb is to limit regular meetings to 90 minutes to two hours at the most. If the agenda is lengthy, consider breaking it into multiple meetings or allocating extra time for each item. If the meeting is running long and you haven't finished all items, it's okay to adjourn and resume later. The goal is not to fill time, but to achieve results. If certain discussions are taking too long, the chairperson can summarize and move on. It's better to have a productive 45-minute meeting than a dragged-out two-hour meeting that accomplishes little.

- **Encourage Participation:** A successful meeting is one where everyone has a chance to contribute. The chairperson should encourage members to share their thoughts, concerns, and ideas. This can be done by asking open-ended questions, calling on quieter members, or creating an atmosphere where people feel comfortable speaking up. It's also important to value all contributions—even if a suggestion seems unconventional, give it a fair hearing. By involving the congregation in the decision-making process, the meeting becomes more meaningful, and people feel more invested in the outcome. However, the chairperson should also ensure that no one dominates the conversation. If a few members are speaking repeatedly, the chairperson can invite others to join in or limit each person's speaking time.
- **Maintain a Positive Tone:** The chairperson sets the tone of the meeting. It's important to be approachable, confident, and positive. Greet members warmly, smile, and make eye contact. Avoid speaking in a monotone or in a way that sounds dismissive. If a discussion becomes heated, the chairperson should step in to defuse tension. A calm, respectful demeanor can help keep the meeting focused on solutions rather than conflict. Remember that this is a meeting of believers, so it's appropriate to interject a word of prayer or encourage unity when needed. By maintaining a positive and inclusive tone, the chairperson creates an environment where members feel valued and where disagreements can be handled constructively.

- **Use Visual Aids and Materials:** To enhance understanding and engagement, use visual aids and materials when appropriate. This could include power point slides for financial reports, charts or graphs, handouts. Visual aids can make complex information easier to grasp and can also make the meeting more interesting. However, don't overdo it—too many slides or distractions can be counterproductive. The key is to use visuals that support the discussion and that are easy to follow. The chairperson should be comfortable using the equipment (projector, computer, etc.) and should ensure that materials are clear and legible. By allowing for the use of effective visuals, the chairperson can make the meeting more dynamic and ensure that all members can follow along with the information being presented.
- **Follow Up on Decisions:** One of the most important aspects of a successful meeting is following up on decisions. After the meeting, the chairperson should ensure that any action items or decisions are assigned to specific people with clear deadlines. This might involve writing minutes that document the decisions and distributing them to the relevant committees or individuals. The chairperson should also follow up with those responsible to make sure that tasks are completed on time. By having a system for follow-up, the meeting's outcomes are not just discussed—they are implemented. This not only shows that the church is serious about its decisions but also keeps everyone accountable. The chairperson can include a brief follow-up item in the next meeting to check on progress. Effective follow-up ensures that the meeting truly leads to tangible results for the church.
- **Be Prepared and Informed:** As the leader, the chairperson should be well-prepared for the meeting. This means reading any reports or materials in advance, knowing the agenda inside out, and being ready to answer questions. If the chairperson is unsure about something, it's better to admit it and say, "Let's discuss this further or I'll get back to you on that." Being prepared and knowledgeable instills confidence in the members and helps the meeting run smoothly. Additionally, the chairperson should be aware of

the church's bylaws and any relevant policies—this knowledge will help in handling any procedural issues that arise. By being prepared, the chairperson can focus on leading the discussion rather than scrambling to find information.

- **Seek Feedback and Improve:** After each meeting, take time to reflect on how it went. Ask yourself and your team: What went well? What could have been improved? Did we accomplish our objectives? Solicit feedback from other leaders or members. If possible, conduct a brief evaluation after the meeting or send out a survey to get input. Use this feedback to adjust for future meetings. For example, if members felt the meeting was too long, you might shorten it; if they found certain reports confusing, you might provide more detailed materials. Continuously striving to improve the meeting process will make future meetings more effective. Remember, leading a church business meeting is a skill that can be developed with practice and reflection.

By implementing these tips, the chairperson can create a more engaging and productive church business meeting. The goal is to honor God and the church community by making the most of the time spent together. When meetings are efficient, focused, and inclusive, they become a powerful tool for the church's growth and unity. As the old saying goes, "Well begun is half done." By following these guidelines, you can ensure that your church business meetings are well begun—and well ended—in the service of God's kingdom.

## COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID

Even with the best intentions, church business meetings can sometimes go off track or become unproductive. Here are some common mistakes to watch out for and how to avoid them:

- **Lack of Preparation:** A frequent mistake is not preparing adequately for the meeting. This can lead to confusion, missed items, or last-minute scrambling. To avoid this, always have a detailed agenda and gather all necessary materials in advance. Set a clear purpose for the meeting and ensure that the right people are invit-

ed. Being prepared also means understanding the agenda items well so that you can facilitate the discussion effectively. By investing time in preparation, you set the stage for a smooth meeting.

- **Ignoring the Agenda:** Another common mistake is deviating too far from the agenda. It's easy for discussions to veer off-topic or for new issues to come up that weren't anticipated. While it's important to be flexible, avoid spending excessive time on unrelated topics. If something urgent or important comes up that isn't on the agenda, the chairperson can decide to either discuss it immediately (with the understanding that it might take the meeting beyond its scheduled time) or table it for future discussion. The key is to maintain focus on the agenda items unless there is a compelling reason to change course. Sticking to the agenda helps keep the meeting on schedule and ensures that all essential topics are addressed.
- **Failure to Control Time:** Meetings that run long are a common source of frustration. The chairperson may allow discussions to drag on or underestimate how much time certain items will take. To avoid this, be realistic about time allocation and monitor the clock. If a discussion is taking too long, the chairperson should summarize and encourage the group to move on. It's better to have a productive 45-minute meeting than a dragged-out two-hour meeting that accomplishes little. The chairperson should also start and end on time—don't allow the meeting to start late or run overtime unless necessary. By controlling time, you respect everyone's schedule and show that the meeting is efficient.
- **Not Respecting the Quorum:** Failing to ensure a quorum is present can render a meeting's decisions invalid. Some leaders may proceed with a meeting even if only a handful of members are present, thinking that it's still a valid gathering. However, many churches governing documents require a minimum number of members to be present to conduct official business. The chairperson should verify the quorum before starting the meeting and be prepared to adjourn if a quorum is not met. Allowing a meeting to proceed without a quorum can lead to decisions that no one is authorized to make. To avoid this mistake, make quorum requirements

clear and enforce them. If a quorum is not present, consider rescheduling the meeting or holding an information session instead.

- **Allowing Disruptions:** A lack of order can derail a meeting. This includes people talking over each other, interrupting the speaker, or engaging in side conversations. The chairperson should establish ground rules at the beginning of the meeting about respecting others' turns to speak. If disruptions occur, the chairperson should address them promptly and firmly but respectfully. For example, the chairperson can say, "Let's all listen to each other one at a time. Please wait for your turn to speak." By maintaining order, the chairperson ensures that the meeting can proceed in an orderly fashion and that everyone's voices are heard. If a particularly disruptive member is present, the chairperson may need to have a private conversation with them after the meeting or involve the leadership team to address the issue.
- **Failure to Make Decisions:** Sometimes meetings can become bogged down in discussion without reaching a decision. This can happen if the chairperson doesn't know how to facilitate reaching a conclusion or if members are hesitant to vote. To avoid this, the chairperson should be clear about the desired outcome of each discussion. If a consensus is not reached, the chairperson should be prepared to call for a vote. It's important to remember that not every issue requires a full debate—sometimes a simple majority vote is sufficient to move forward. The chairperson should also be prepared to break ties or to use a procedural move if needed. By making decisions in a timely manner, the meeting accomplishes its purpose. If a decision is delayed too long, it can leave members feeling frustrated or uncertain about the church's direction.
- **Neglecting Follow-Up:** A meeting is only as good as its follow-up. Many churches make the mistake of having meetings but then not following up on the decisions made. This can lead to important tasks not being completed or issues not being resolved. To avoid this, the chairperson should ensure that any action items or decisions are documented and assigned to specific people with deadlines. Minutes should be distributed after the meeting, and the chair-

person should follow up with those responsible to ensure tasks are completed. By having a system for follow-up, the meeting's outcomes are not just discussed—they are implemented. This shows that the church is serious about its decisions and keeps everyone accountable. If follow-up is neglected, the meeting can feel like a waste of time to participants, as nothing concrete comes from it.

- **Not Using Parliamentary Procedure:** Without a clear set of rules, meetings can descend into chaos. Some church leaders avoid using parliamentary procedure out of ignorance or a desire to keep things informal. However, not having a structure can lead to confusion, especially in larger meetings or when there are disagreements. It's wise to adopt a system of parliamentary procedure (even if it's a simplified version) to govern meetings. This provides a framework for order and fairness. If a church doesn't have a specific procedure, the chairperson can refer to a basic guide like Robert's Rules of Order. By using parliamentary procedure, the chairperson can handle motions, amendments, and votes in an orderly way, which prevents arguments and ensures that the meeting stays on track. Not using procedure can also lead to misunderstandings about who is in charge or how decisions are made, which can undermine the authority of the meeting.
- **Forgetting the Spiritual Aspect:** Sometimes in the business of running the church, leaders forget that these meetings are also spiritual gatherings. It's easy to get caught up in details and lose sight of the bigger picture of God's work. To avoid this, start and end the meeting with prayer, and keep the focus on the church's mission and values. Encourage members to approach the meeting with humility and a spirit of unity. Remember that the decisions made in the meeting are ultimately for the glory of God and the good of the congregation. If discussions become contentious, the chairperson can remind the group of the importance of working together in love and speaking in truth. By maintaining the spiritual tone, the meeting remains a sacred space where God's people can come together to serve. This can greatly enhance the atmosphere and make the meeting more fruitful.

- **Over-Reliance on One Person:** It's important for the chairperson to involve others and not try to do everything alone. Some leaders make the mistake of micromanaging the meeting or trying to handle all the speaking themselves. This can lead to burnout and a lack of engagement from other members. Instead, the chairperson should delegate tasks and responsibilities to others. For example, assign a secretary to take minutes, involve committee chairs in presenting reports, and encourage members to share announcements. By spreading the workload, the meeting becomes more collaborative and efficient. The chairperson should also be willing to step back and let others lead in certain areas. This not only lightens the chairperson's load but also empowers other leaders in the church. Over-reliance on one person can also make the meeting less representative of the congregation's input.

By being aware of these common mistakes and actively working to avoid them, church leaders can significantly improve the quality of their business meetings. The goal is to create a meeting environment that is respectful, productive, and focused on the church's mission. With careful planning, effective leadership, and a commitment to improvement, church business meetings can become a powerful tool for the church's growth and unity, rather than a source of frustration. Remember, each meeting is an opportunity to serve God and the community—by learning from past experiences and striving for excellence, you can lead meetings that truly make a difference.

## CONCLUSION

Leading a church business meeting is both a privilege and a responsibility. It is a time when the church body comes together to discuss and decide on matters that affect its life and ministry. By following the practical steps outlined in this guide—from setting a clear agenda and gathering information to conducting the meeting with respect and order—church leaders can ensure that these gatherings are productive, inclusive, and aligned with the church's mission. The role of the chairperson is central to this process, requiring skill in facilitation, knowledge of parliamentary procedure, and a heart for unity and service. By fulfilling the chairper-

son's duties effectively, the meeting can become a powerful forum for decision-making and community building.

Key takeaways from this appendix include the importance of thorough preparation, the need for a well-structured agenda and clear objectives, the use of parliamentary procedure to maintain order, and the value of follow-up to ensure that decisions are implemented. By avoiding common mistakes and continuously seeking to improve, church leaders can turn routine meetings into meaningful opportunities for the church to grow and serve. Remember, a successful church business meeting is not just about checking off items on a list—it's about bringing the body of Christ together in prayer, discussion, and decision-making, guided by the Holy Spirit. When done well, these meetings strengthen the church's unity, foster accountability, and move the ministry forward with purpose.

In closing, leading a church business meeting requires a combination of leadership skills, spiritual insight, and practical organization. It is a reminder that the church is a community of believers working together under God's guidance to fulfill **His** mission. By leading with humility, respect, and a focus on the Lord's work, the chairperson can create an atmosphere where every member feels valued and heard. The decisions taken at these meetings, while important, are ultimately in service of the church's larger mission to fulfill the *Missio Dei* God's Mission by loving God and one another so that the church can represent God most clearly as agents of transformation in His world through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

May we all approach our church business meetings with a spirit of unity, prayer, and commitment, knowing that through them we can honor God and build up His kingdom.



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## APPENDIX C

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# BUDGETING FINANCES FOR A LOCAL CHURCH: A PRACTICAL GUIDE<sup>1</sup>

At the heart of Christian stewardship is the recognition that everything we have is a gift from God. The Bible teaches that God created the heavens and the earth and placed humanity in charge of it as stewards. From a theological perspective, a local church's finances are not "ours" to do with as we please; they are God's resources entrusted to the church for the furtherance of His kingdom.<sup>2</sup> The apostle Paul writes, "We are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building" (1 Corinthians 3:9). This declaration means that as the church, we are co-laborers with God, and the money we handle is part of the "field" He is cultivating.

Theological stewardship<sup>3</sup> is not just about money—it is about faithful management of all God's gifts (time, talents, and resources) in service to Him. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were commanded to give a tenth of their income as a tithe (Leviticus 27:30). This tithe was a way to honor God and support the community's religious and economic life, ensuring that the Lord's work (temple upkeep, support for priests, etc.) was sustained. New Testament teaching echoes this principle: believers are to give *cheerfully and generously* (2 Corinthians 9:7), not grudgingly or under compulsion (Deuteronomy 15:10). Jesus taught about storing up treasures in heaven rather than on earth (Matthew 6:19–21), which calls us to prioritize the

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<sup>1</sup> These practical steps are based on the course notes developed by Prof Harold for the Church Administration course for Cape Town Baptist Seminary.

<sup>2</sup> J. Dunlop, *Budgeting for a Healthy Church: Aligning Finances with Biblical Priorities* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), pp 2, 19, 26.

<sup>3</sup> T.A. Kantonen, *A Theology for Christian Stewardship* (United States: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2001).

kingdom of God over earthly possessions. Stewardship is thus a spiritual discipline and a matter of honoring God with our resources.<sup>4</sup> It reflects our trust in God's provision and our willingness to follow His guidance. When we budget and manage finances with a biblical mindset, we acknowledge that God is the ultimate source of all wealth (Proverbs 3:9–10; 1 Timothy 6:17). We also recognize that generosity is an act of worship. As 2 Corinthians 9:11 says, “You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.” Our giving is not merely an accounting exercise but an expression of our love for God and our desire to serve others. In essence, stewardship is about aligning our financial decisions with God's will and purposes, so that every dollar is used to build up the body of Christ and advance His kingdom.

By grounding our budgeting in a theology of stewardship, we ensure that the church's finances are not just a means to pay bills, but a vehicle for mission. We seek to honor God by being wise and responsible managers of His money, avoiding waste and greed, and using resources to meet the needs of the community and spread the gospel. This mindset shifts the focus from self-interest to serving God and others, creating a culture of generosity and accountability within the church.

## **PRACTICAL STEPS FOR BUDGETING FINANCES**

Budgeting is a crucial part of managing a church's finances, and it requires careful planning and execution. Below are practical steps to guide the budgeting process in a local church, with an emphasis on biblical principles and best practices:

### **Assess Income and Expenses**

#### *Understand Current Finances*

Begin by gathering historical financial data. Review the church's income and expenses from the past 1–3 years. Look at sources of income (tithes, offerings, grants, special gifts, facility rentals, etc.) and categories of expenses (staff salaries, utilities, supplies, ministry programs, etc.). Identify any patterns or trends. For example, do you see seasonal fluctuations in giving? Are there any

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<sup>4</sup> T.A. Kantonen, *A Theology for Christian Stewardship: And the Chief Steward* (United States: Concordia Publishing House, 1986).

large one-time expenses or income sources that are not recurring? This analysis will provide a baseline for your budget planning.

#### *Estimate Future Income:*

Based on historical giving and any expected changes, estimate the church's income for the upcoming year. Be conservative in your projections—plan for realistic, sustainable growth rather than overly optimistic gains. If your church is growing, consider how new members or increased attendance might impact giving. If it's a smaller church, be cautious about assuming significant revenue spikes (it's often better to *underestimate* income). Many churches use the lower end of recent averages for projections to avoid overspending. If you anticipate one-time or irregular income (such as a special campaign or grant), include it but note that it's uncertain. The goal is to have a clear picture of how much money you can reasonably expect to have available.

#### *List All Expenses:*

Next, make a comprehensive list of all expenses the church will incur. Categorize expenses into broad categories (e.g., staff, facilities, ministry programs, missions, administration, etc.) and then detail each line item. It's easy to overlook smaller expenses, so review bank statements, past invoices, and any ongoing contracts to ensure nothing is missed. Common overlooked expenses include software subscriptions, insurance premium increases, unexpected repairs, and payroll taxes/benefits. Be sure to include both fixed expenses (such as rent, utilities, loan payments, and regular staff salaries) and variable expenses (such as supplies, travel, or event costs that can fluctuate). Separating expenses into fixed vs. variable helps in understanding what costs are essential and what might be adjusted if needed.

#### *Consider Seasonal or Irregular Costs*

Factor in any seasonal variations in expenses. For instance, heating or cooling costs might be higher in certain months if you use air conditioners and heaters, or special events like holiday bible programs or summer camps might incur extra expenses. If the church is planning a major project (like a building renovation or a capital campaign), budget for those expenses separately as well. By identifying these in advance, you can allocate funds or plan fundraising efforts to cover them without derailing the general budget.

The key is to have a holistic view of all income and expenses so that you can begin to see where the church stands financially.

## Set Budget Goals and Priorities

### *Align with Mission and Vision*

Before finalizing the budget, clearly define the church's mission and vision for the coming year. The budget should be a tool that supports these goals. For example, if the church's vision is to expand its outreach to the community, ensure that a portion of the budget is allocated to relevant programs or evangelistic initiatives. If the priority is to improve facilities for safety or accessibility, set aside funds for those improvements. Aligning the budget with the church's mission helps everyone understand *why* we spend money in certain ways. As the saying goes, "A church without a budget is like a car without GPS—you have no direction." With a GPS (budget), you can navigate toward your ministry objectives.

### *Determine Financial Priorities*

Based on the mission, identify the top financial priorities for the year. This might include funding a new staff position, supporting a specific missionary or outreach project, paying off debt, or maintaining the building. It is important to rank these priorities and decide which are *essential*, which are *important*, and which are *aspirational*. Essential items are those without which the church cannot fulfill its core mission (e.g., salaries of pastoral staff, utility bills to keep the building open). Important items contribute to the mission but could be adjusted if resources are tight (e.g., certain ministry programs or moderate facility maintenance). Aspirational items are long-term goals or nice-to-have projects that you'd like to achieve if extra funds become available (e.g., a building expansion or a significant new initiative). By categorizing priorities, you can ensure that the budget allocates resources to the most critical needs first. This helps avoid the temptation to overspend on secondary items when primary needs are not met.

### *Set Realistic Targets*

Using the assessed income and your priorities, set realistic financial targets. For example, you might decide to allocate a certain percentage of income to specific categories (more on this in the next section) or to fund specific

projects. It is wise to set both short-term and long-term targets. Short-term targets could be, say, maintaining a balanced budget (no deficit) for the year, or paying off a portion of debt. Long-term targets might include building a reserve fund equivalent to 3–6 months of operating expenses or saving for a future facility upgrade. Having clear targets gives direction to the budgeting process and provides a benchmark for measuring success. Remember to be prudent in your targets—aim for sustainability rather than quick fixes. If your income projections are modest, do not set targets that exceed what you realistically can achieve. This sets the stage for a budget that is both visionary and achievable.

## Create the Budget

### *Choose a Budgeting Method<sup>5</sup>*

There are several approaches to creating a church budget. The simplest is the **line-item budget**, where you list each expense item from last year and then adjust for the new year (adding or subtracting as needed). This method is straightforward and works well if your church's expenses change only gradually from year to year. Another common method is the **percentage-based allocation model**, where you allocate a certain percentage of total revenue to major expense categories (such as staff, facilities, ministry programs, missions, etc.) based on historical patterns or best practices. For example, a church might allocate 50% of income to staff, 25% to facilities, 15% to ministry programs, 5% to missions, and 5% to reserve/other. This model provides a quick snapshot of financial strategy and ensures essential areas are funded, but it requires careful justification if adjustments are made. A third approach is **zero-based budgeting (ZBB)**, where you start from scratch each year and justify every expense as if it were being incurred for the first time. ZBB forces every department to defend its spending, which can eliminate waste and align spending with current priorities. It is more time-intensive but can yield great results for accountability. Some churches also use a program budget, where each ministry or program has its own budget line and you can see how much each con-

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<sup>5</sup> There are many free online templates to help guide you prepare a budget. See <https://www.vancopayments.com/egiving/blog/church-budgeting-template-guide#Why-Church-Budgeting>.

tributes to the whole. The choice of method depends on your church's size, complexity, and preference for control vs. flexibility. Many churches use a combination of these methods—for instance, starting with a percentage-based allocation and then drilling down into line items for detailed planning. The important thing is to pick a method that will help you plan and control your finances effectively.

### *Allocate Funds to Categories*

Once you have chosen a method, allocate the projected income to various expense categories. If you use a percentage-based model, you will determine the percentage for each category based on your priorities and historical data. For example, a typical allocation might be: 45–55% for personnel, 25–35% for facilities and operations, 10–15% for ministry programs, 5–15% for missions/outreach, and the remainder for administration or reserves. These ranges serve as benchmarks; however, your church's specific needs may require adjustments. For instance, if your church is young and has few facilities costs, you might allocate more to ministry programs. If you have a large building, facilities might take a larger share. It is common to include a contingency fund (usually 3–5% of the budget) to cover unexpected expenses. This helps protect the more essential budget items from being depleted by unforeseen costs. If using a line-item approach, you'll list each expense with its estimated amount. In either case, ensure that total expenses do not exceed total income (a balanced budget is ideal). If there is a deficit (expenses exceed income), you'll need to adjust either by increasing income or cutting expenses until the budget is balanced. This is a crucial step—your budget must be sustainable. Avoid creating a budget that assumes you can spend more than you bring in, as this can lead to financial instability.

### *Include Financial Goals and Notes*

In addition to the numerical budget, incorporate any specific financial goals or notes in the budget document. For example, if one goal is to pay off a loan, you might include a line for “Debt Repayment” and specify the amount. If you plan to build a reserve fund, note the target amount. You might also include a brief narrative explaining how the budget supports the church's mission and priorities. This helps the congregation understand the “why” behind the numbers. A well-crafted

budget not only has figures but also a story: it outlines the ministry's vision and how money will be used to achieve it. Finally, ensure that the budget is transparent and easy to follow. Use clear categories and labels so that anyone (board members, finance committee, congregation) can quickly see where the money is going. Many churches find it helpful to present the budget in both summary form (with totals for each category) and detailed form (with line items). This way, leaders can drill down into specifics while the congregation gets a high-level view. Once the budget is drafted, it is time to present it for approval and then implement it.

## **Monitor and Review the Budget**

### *Implement the Budget*

Once approved, communicate the budget to all relevant parties (staff, ministry leaders, trustees, etc.) and begin to implement it. Make sure each person understands their budgeted amounts and any spending limits or approval processes. For example, if a certain expense requires two signatures or board approval, clarify that. Implementing the budget means that each month or quarter, actual income and expenses are tracked against the budget. The budget is a living document that should be revisited and adjusted as needed, not a static plan set in stone. Regular monitoring allows you to catch issues early and make corrections before they become major problems. Many churches use accounting software or spreadsheets to track finances; these tools can generate reports showing income vs. expenses for each category. Set up a schedule for reviewing the financial reports—for example, monthly or quarterly check-ins with the finance committee or board. This process will help you stay on top of the church's financial health and make informed decisions. Remember, the goal is to ensure that the church is stewarding resources responsibly and staying within budget.

### *Adjust as Needed*

During the year, if you find that actual income is lower than projected or that expenses are running higher than expected, you may need to adjust the budget. This is where flexibility comes in. Some churches allow for mid-year budget adjustments if there are unforeseen circumstances. For instance, if a ministry program is more successful than planned and needs additional funds, or if a major expense (like roof

repair) arises unexpectedly, the finance committee can approve a budget amendment. It is important to document these adjustments and communicate them to the congregation, so they understand any changes in how money is being used. On the other hand, if income exceeds projections, you might consider allocating the surplus to a reserve fund or to a new ministry initiative that aligns with the mission. Always adjust responsibly, keeping the church's long-term financial health in mind. It is crucial to plan for flexibility in the budget to accommodate reality, while still adhering to the overall financial plan. By monitoring and adjusting, you ensure that the budget remains a useful tool for guiding the church's finances throughout the year.

#### *Review at Year-End*

At the end of the budget year, conduct a thorough review of the year's financial performance. Compare actual income and expenses to the budget and analyze variances. This review helps in planning the next year's budget and in evaluating the effectiveness of financial decisions. If the church ended the year with a surplus, consider how that surplus will be used (perhaps to pay down debt, fund a project, or build reserves). If there was a deficit, identify the reasons (was it due to lower-than-expected income, higher-than-expected expenses, or a combination) and discuss solutions. Year-end reviews also provide an opportunity to thank God for His provision and to learn lessons for the future. Share the financial results with the congregation in an annual report or meeting, so that everyone is aware of how the budget was executed. This transparency builds trust and helps maintain accountability. By reflecting on the past year's budget, you can improve the budgeting process for the next year and ensure that the church continues to steward resources wisely.

### **Plan for Future Considerations**

#### *Build Reserves and Emergency Funds*

A prudent financial practice is to set aside funds for future needs and emergencies. As part of your budgeting, aim to build a reserve or emergency fund that can cover at least 3–6 months of operating expenses. This provides a financial cushion in case of unexpected expenses (like a sudden building repair or a downturn in giving). Even if you can't reach that goal immediately, start by setting aside a small amount each month

and gradually grow the fund. Having reserves gives the church peace of mind and financial resilience. It is comparable to having an emergency fund for the church; one hopes it is never needed, but it exists to protect the ministry if something goes wrong. When planning your budget, include an allocation for reserves or treat it as a “fixed expense” each month until the fund is built up. If the church has outstanding debt, factor in debt repayment as a long-term budget priority. This could mean setting aside a portion of income each year specifically for paying off loans. Being debt-free (or at least debt-minimized) is a goal for many churches, as it reduces financial stress and frees up funds for ministry. Budgeting for debt repayment in advance helps ensure that you are making progress toward this goal each year.

### *Capital Planning*<sup>6</sup>

If your church has any long-term capital projects in mind (such as building a new facility, expanding the current building, or purchasing property), start planning for these in advance. This might involve setting aside money each year in a capital fund or engaging in a formal capital campaign. For example, if you plan to build a new fellowship hall in 5 years, you could budget a certain amount each year toward that project. Capital planning is an important aspect of budgeting because it allows you to save for large expenses over time rather than trying to come up with the full amount suddenly. It also ensures that the project is integrated into the overall financial strategy of the church. Many churches create a separate capital budget or fund to track these long-term goals. As you draft your budget, consider including a section for capital projects and note how much has been saved toward them. This forward-looking approach helps the church achieve its vision without overextending its current finances.

### *Financial Health and Sustainability*

Finally, keep the church’s long-term financial health in mind when budgeting. A sustainable church financial plan means being mindful of income growth and expense control. This might involve periodically

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<sup>6</sup> For an easy-to-read guide on fundraising See...Brian Kluth e- book *Guide to a Successful Building Fund Drive for Pastors & Church Leaders*. [https://www.kluth.org/ebook\\_building\\_drive.pdf](https://www.kluth.org/ebook_building_drive.pdf)

evaluating whether staffing levels are appropriate for the church's size and needs, or if there are opportunities to reduce costs (for instance, negotiating better insurance rates or using volunteers more strategically). It also means being open to new revenue streams or creative fundraising ideas that can support the mission. The budgeting process itself is a good time to assess the church's financial sustainability—ask questions like: Can we maintain our current programs and staff with our projected income? Do we need to increase giving or explore new sources of income to continue growing? By proactively addressing these questions, you can adjust the budget to ensure the church remains financially viable. Remember, the goal is not just to balance a budget each year, but to steward resources in a way that enables the church to fulfill its mission now and in the future. A well-managed budget is a tool that supports the church's mission, but it must be guided by a vision and wisdom that go beyond the numbers.

## CONCLUSION

Budgeting for a local church is not merely a financial exercise; it is a spiritual discipline and a stewardship responsibility. By integrating a theology of stewardship into the budgeting process, churches can ensure that every dollar is handled with integrity, wisdom, and a focus on God's purposes. This means recognizing that all resources come from God, using them to support the church's mission, and being accountable to God and the congregation for how those resources are managed.

Through practical steps like assessing income and expenses, setting clear goals and priorities, creating a balanced budget, and monitoring and adjusting as needed, churches can effectively steward their finances. The goal is not just to balance a ledger each year, but to enable the church to fulfill its mission and grow in faith. As the Bible teaches, "The one who is faithful in a very small matter is also faithful in a great matter" (Luke 16:10). By being faithful stewards of our finances—whether it's a small church with limited funds or a large church with substantial resources—we honour God and demonstrate our commitment to His kingdom. Ultimately, the budgeting process should lead to a deeper understanding of stewardship, a stronger community of believers, and a greater impact for the gospel in the world. When a

church's finances are managed in line with biblical principles and best practices, it can truly say that it is "stewarding God's gifts" (1 Corinthians 4:2) to the glory of God and the edification of His people.

