

Organizational Models Found Among General Baptist Churches

Four models of church government are common among our churches.

1. Pure Congregationalism is probably the most prevalent among our churches as it fits most single cell organizations where everyone knows everyone else and everyone attends everything. This model of church government will generally be characterized by a monthly business meeting during which all decisions are made.

The strength of this system is that of the consensus and solidarity of the group. This system also has a strong following in the American church because of its dependence on a pure democracy where one person has one vote. The weakness of this system is that it only fits the single cell organization and does not stretch well to fit the middle sized congregation with its multiple ministries and with the variety of schedules represented by the middle sized group that in itself may prohibit universal participation in the governmental structure even though all are welcome to participate if they attend the meeting.

2. Modified Congregationalism is generally used among middle sized General Baptist churches. This system retains the model of church government built around a congregational business meeting but modifies the frequency and nature of the meetings. Generally this modified congregational structure will function with a church council that is representative of the ministries of the church. This representative group researches, plans and coordinates the activities of the congregation. With a carefully planned budget and a coordinated calendar of activities the business sessions are generally restricted to 3 or 4 meetings per year designed to address general issues of elections, budget approval and review of major new initiatives. Many churches with this style of organization function with only one business meeting per year.

3. An identified Leadership Team has become the preferred form of church government for the mission churches now being organized and for those middle sized churches that re-organize to move away from the pure or modified congregationalism described above. The Leadership Team form of church government remains congregational in that an annual meeting establishes the general framework for the church through the elections and budget processes. The Leadership Team differs from the Church Council described above in that the team is more directly involved with the administration of the routine matters of church life. Further the Leadership Team will likely be drawn from key leaders within the congregation rather than from the leaders of individual ministries although the representative style used in the church council may also be used with the formation of the Leadership Team. Generally the Leadership Team will be a smaller group than a Church Council as described above.

4. The presence of Presiding or Ruling Elders takes the concept of a Leadership Team one step further by recognizing that some members of the congregation have a special gift of administration and a level of spiritual discernment that warrants being entrusted with the general guidance of the congregation. These Elders then function in partnership

with the pastor/s to oversee the life and ministry of the congregation. The number of elders will generally be smaller than the number included in a Leadership Team model. The pastor will generally serve as chairman of the elders. This model draws heavily from the New Testament model exhibited in the book of Acts and in the Pastoral Epistles directed to Timothy and Titus. Other organizational framework will be present in the congregation to meet the needs of the ministry but all organizational framework submits to the authority of the elders who themselves are selected and set apart by the congregation for this special role of service. Generally the Elders appoint ministry leaders or submit nominations to the congregation.