



Board Members: The Core Volunteers

The most important group of volunteers in a church is the *official governing board*. They serve primarily because they love God and the church. They do not seek payment, benefits, or freebies of any kind—volunteers by definition supply “free labour.” Often unnoticed and unappreciated, they supply the structure and the strength that holds the church together.

In our churches board members are called deacons, elders, trustees, directors—the label makes little difference. The Bible establishes principles which relate to the character and maturity of people who serve as volunteer lay leaders in the church but does not dictate a specific form of administration for all time. Church governance changes as the need becomes evident—this dynamic quality of local church leadership may be found among the different churches in the New Testament.

Legal Status

In some respects the modern church board serves in ways that were never discussed in the New Testament. For example, the early churches did not own property and were never called upon to relate to the secular governments of the day—as a matter of fact the Christian church was not even considered a legal entity until Constantine came to power in the 4th century A.D. Today in Canada the religious societies acts in the different provinces grant the authority for groups through their official boards to function in their communities and beyond. In recognition of the contribution the church makes to the life of the community, most municipalities exempt the church from property taxes.

In relationship with the federal government, the local church registers as a charity and is able to receipt donations which the Canadian Revenue Agency recognizes for income tax credits. It is the official board which administers the funds, issues the receipts, monitors budgets, and submits all the forms which must be filed regularly with the Canadian government. Furthermore, the board is accountable to government to administer payroll deductions and to enforce labour laws and regulations. The Apostle Paul probably never thought of such responsibilities for the church board. He does say, however, “If God has given you administrative ability and put you in charge of the work of others, take the responsibility seriously” (Rom. 12:8 TLB).

While it is a fact that the New Testament church was not called upon to interact with the political powers, Jesus laid down the guiding principle which should always govern Christian conduct: “. . . give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s” (Luke 20:25). And there it is in a nutshell. Boards must remember that they operate in two realms, Caesar’s and God’s. They need not call a prayer meeting to pay the bills and obey the law and they won’t get much inspiration from the *Tax Act* when they need to get on their knees with a towel and basin. Discernment is the gift of knowing whether to pay or pray.

Congregational Status

The primary obligation of boards is to remember where they came from—from the membership. The first reference in *Acts* about adding a sub-layer of leadership is helpful: “Brothers, choose seven men *from among you* who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom” (6:3). After choosing the first “board members,” the people then “presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them” (6:6). That’s a tried and trusted procedure.

We know that the churches in Ephesus and Philippi called their lay ministers “deacons” (I Tim. 3:8-12; Phil. 1:1). Deacon is a good title because the Greek word *diakonos* (dee-ak’-on-os) quite literally means *minister* or *servant*. Board members have the great privilege of serving the people who asked them to take the job. To accept is to become a dedicated volunteer.

Pastoral Status

Board members are assistants to the pastor and his staff. In *Acts* the apostles said in reference to the new “board members,” “We will turn this responsibility over to them” (6:3). And that’s a good policy. The spiritual leaders (pastors were often called *elders* or *overseers* in the New Testament) turn over to the board the services which they need help performing. Boards need to remember that they serve as employers in reference to the laws of Caesar but as ministering servants in partnership with the pastor in the Lord’s Kingdom.

*William A. Griffin is the Director of Stewardship for
The Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada and
the Editor of Enrich*