

SPIRIT-LED ORGANIZATIONS

Follow a biblical model for organizing a congregation

There is no single model in the Bible for organizing churches; that's why we have so many kinds in the different denominations and branches of the Church. Baptists have generally followed a simple model, with a pastor and deacons sharing leadership within the congregation and giving most of the authority for making decisions to the whole congregation. Over time, of course, most Baptist churches have also formed a variety of committees and boards and sometimes a complex form of organization and structure for overseeing the work of the congregation. Those additions to our organizational structures have no specific biblical foundations. That doesn't mean they are wrong or unbiblical; it just means we are free to follow the Spirit's leading in making those choices.



All biblical models follow one core principle: God's people follow God's leadership through the Spirit. Throughout Scripture, that principle was followed—by the patriarchs, the kings, the prophets, Jesus and the apostles. When leaders of the people—or the people themselves—failed to follow God's leadership through the Spirit, they also failed to live up to what God wanted for them. And they often got into trouble of all kinds.

Practice spiritual discernment in decision-making

How do we know whether we are following God's leadership? How do we know if we are listening to the Spirit? There are no easy answers. There is no simple 5-step process that will result in a clear knowledge of God's will. It is a matter of heart and soul, as well as of mind. Democratic decision-making processes do not always result in following God's leadership. For example, the

people of Israel all wanted a king to rule over them when God had not chosen one, but their kings, more often than not, were not faithful to God and led them in the wrong directions. And the apostle Paul was criticized by a majority of the Church when he went out to preach to Gentiles, but that was God's call for his life and God's will for the whole Church.

F O C U S
What process for discernment will help us make decisions consistent with God's desires for us?

Several models for the practice of spiritual discernment can be found in some of the resources listed below. The model of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St. Ignatius, used by the Jesuits for spiritual formation for 500 years, is widely used today by non-Catholics, both by individuals and by groups. Worshipful-work is a model developed by a team of Presbyterians and Catholics and widely used in the Church. All the models share some common principles:

- Be aware of God's presence and maintain a prayerful attitude throughout the process. Begin with Scripture and prayer, and perhaps with singing or another devotional reading.
- Remember the love and grace God has given us and be grateful for yourself and for others.
- Ask God's grace to search your hearts and minds for anything that might keep you from hearing the Spirit's voice.
- Identify and describe the decision to be made and the options you can see at that moment. Give each person an opportunity, while others listen silently, to speak openly about their feelings and thoughts concerning the decision. No response is allowed at this point.
- Pray together about the decision, asking God for the grace to know as a group what to do.
- Open discussion (not debate) is appropriate at this

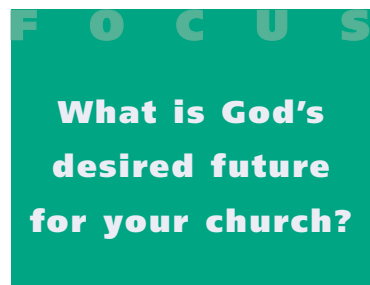
point, until consensus is reached. (Someone might disagree with the decision, but still agree to support the group in its decision.)

- If no consensus is possible, return to prayer as a group. Or agree to make no decision at that time and to continue to pray about it. (It's better not to make a decision if making it now will create hurt, anger, or shame or will even divide the group.)

This process may feel awkward and forced because we are not used to it, but it can be learned and practiced until it feels comfortable and natural. Most of us have learned the principles of parliamentary procedure. In fact many churches have constitutions that say they must use *Robert's Rules of Order* in their decision-making process, but even a democratic process does not have to follow those rigid rules. Consensus-building and spiritual discernment are also democratic. And these have the advantage of potentially creating a strong community in which respect, compassion, hope, and love are experienced by everyone.

Craft a statement of the congregation 's vision

As disciple-making congregations experience community and practice spiritual discernment, a vision of God's desired future for them will become clearer. This may happen spontaneously. More likely, it will come as a result of an intentional process of envisioning by the whole church.



Many resources are available to guide a church through a discernment process. While these guides vary, there are some common principles among them:

- Study the Scriptures to learn God's intentions for the mission and ministry of the church. (This *2007 Planning Guide* is designed to help you in that process.)
- Use a survey to assess the members' feelings and thoughts about the church and their hopes and dreams for its future.
- Obtain information about your community that will help you compare the needs and desires, the hopes

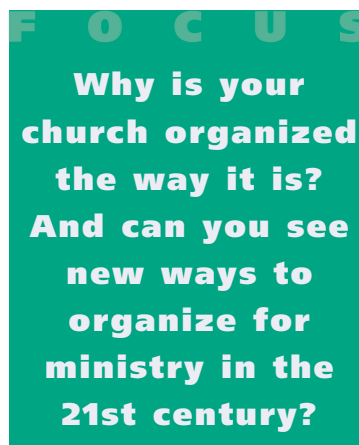
and dreams, of people outside the church with what the people of the congregation have said about your church. That may reveal new areas of ministry, or potential changes in existing ministry, which the congregation may want to consider.

- Build on your congregation's strengths and focus on an area that needs to be strengthened, creating a plan of action to guide your work over the next several months. Create a short-term action plan in the context of a larger strategy plan, maybe three to five years.
- Recruit leadership and other volunteers to assume responsibilities for each agreed-upon action, set time-lines for accomplishing your goals, and regularly evaluate your progress. Celebrate everything good that happens, no matter how small.

Throughout this process, resist the temptation to use traditional models of planning and decision-making. Stay with spiritual discernment as your continuing practice in all you do together.

Evaluate the church's organization

If your church is like most churches in the United States, the way it is structured reflects 20th century efforts to create committees, boards, and other groups so that everyone would have a role in the work of the church. Some churches were structured that way when they were larger. Others were structured around a business model common to that era. If your church maintains a structure created fifty or sixty years ago, you probably needs to consider major changes.



In the mid-20th century, American churches thought of themselves as religious organizations and were structured to meet the internal needs of growing congregations. In the 21st century, many churches realize the importance of consciously becoming missional churches – missions in the

midst of a world that needs the gospel of Jesus Christ. A church seeking to maintain what it has and to serve its internal needs will be organized far differently than a congregation seeking to go out into the world to proclaim the gospel and make disciples. Those are the churches we read about in the Scriptures, so it makes sense to consider new structures that are more like the early churches. Here are some common principles:

- Buildings and staff were minimal. Apostles and pastors usually earned their living from their work as ministers, but they were often what we now call bivocational ministers (earning part of their living from a trade, for instance). We face difficult decisions about buildings; as much as possible, when planting a new church, or renovating or replacing existing buildings, we can look at options that will keep maintenance costs to a minimum.
- Decisions were made quickly and easily so the work could continue. Spiritual discernment was practiced. Committees and boards were non-existent. We may choose to keep some boards or committees because they have an important oversight role for the church's ministry, but we can create a simpler process for making decisions.
- Their focus was not on maintenance or survival, but on evangelism and growth and proclamation of the gospel. Disciple-making congregations will have this focus and will make choices based on these commitments.



Create an organization that will support effective ministry

Transforming churches into communities of disciples that engage in effective ministry requires, in part, an organization that can support and sustain that work. Change will not be easy. Some people will want to “protect their turf,” making sure that what they care most about is safe. Some individuals will not want to give up the building, because of their memories and attachments to it. Some people will not see the importance of partnerships in the wider ministry in the world.



Conflict will surface whenever change happens. Review again the sections on Transforming Leadership and on Spiritual and Relational Vitality. Learn all you can about conflict transformation and leading a congregation through change. Practice spiritual discernment throughout the process. Seek God's grace, strength, wisdom, patience, and love as you seek to be a transforming leader for your disciple-making congregation.

ORGANIZACIONES DIRIGIDAS POR EL ESPÍRITU

La iglesia discipuladora permite que sus miembros ministren. Las estructuras organizacionales son de ayuda para la misión. El discipulado y la misión tienen prioridad ante la tradición. Los(as) líderes entienden que deben tener visión para cumplir la misión de Cristo y traer otras personas a esta visión.

La iglesia es un organismo vivo, no una estructura rígida. Los patrones que en un tiempo servían a la congregación, tal vez no sean efectivos en una iglesia discipuladora. Los sistemas de mando y control, con responsabilidades cuidadosamente delineadas y áreas de autoridad claramente definidas, no proveen las características dinámicas que se necesitan en la iglesia discipuladora; tampoco permiten que el Espíritu se mueva con libertad al repartir los dones y al hacer el llamado al ministerio.

ENFOCAR
¿Qué proceso nos ayudaría a hacer decisiones según los deseos de Dios para nosotros?

En una iglesia discipuladora, la organización mantiene el enfoque en la misión. Todas las posiciones contribuyen a alcanzar la visión. Los equipos ministeriales realizan los diferentes ministerios en la iglesia, tanto dentro (la escuela dominical) como fuera (misión comunitaria). La estructura, así como todo aspecto de la congregación, existe para servir al discipulado en nombre de la misión.

La organización en la iglesia discipuladora depende de la visión común de la congregación, un entendimiento de las creencias esenciales y de confianza compartida. La visión en común provee dirección y propósito en todo lo que se hace en el ministerio. Las creencias esenciales proveen valores para implementar todo ministerio. Todos(as) entienden cómo se realiza el ministerio en esta iglesia. La confianza ayuda a las personas a vivir su llamado en un contexto de una comunidad afirmadora y habilitadora.

ENFOCAR
¿Por qué su iglesia está organizada de la manera en que lo está? ¿Y puede usted ver nuevas maneras de organizar para el ministerio en el Siglo XXI?

Las discusiones prolongadas y los votos de aprobación pueden frustrar el trabajo del Espíritu al habilitar a las personas para el ministerio. Estas características tradicionales de la estructura de la iglesia dan paso a la iglesia discipuladora a estructuras que equipan, dotan y habilitan a las personas para el ministerio. La iglesia discipuladora no requiere que todas las personas se involucren o apoyen en cada ministerio, sino que afirma el llamado de cada uno(a) de sus miembros. Un llamado en el contexto de un grupo de apoyo que no invalida las creencias esenciales de la iglesia puede llegar a ser un recurso para el ministerio y la misión.

Este tipo de organización provee dirección, pero no obstruye la creatividad. Permite que las personas respondan a su pasión para el ministerio, evitando caos. Es una estructura que va más allá del mantenimiento de una organización, lleva a la propagación de discípulos(as).

