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Burnsville, MN: (952) 892-3366 | Sioux Falls, SD (605) 357-8833 | Fletcher, NC (828) 674-2307

Effective Congregation Council Leadership

“Faith changes the nature of leadership. What distinguishes Christian leadership from other forms of leadership is its purpose --to cultivate thriving communities that bear witness to the reign of God.” (Duke Divinity, Leadership education)

“Boards of Trustees are supposed to be the ultimate guardians of institutional ethos and organizational values” --Richard Chait, Governance as Leadership

Carver:

- Boards set policies the management implements
- Board determines ends and management determines the means

In the congregation, depending on its size, sometimes “management” is staff and sometimes management is a team of members of the congregation who take ownership of the goal. Most congregations do not have enough financial resources to turn implementation of each goal over to staff.

Congregation Council should focus on

- Vision
- Mission
- Strategic Priorities

Staff and teams (committees) should focus on

- Goals
- Operations

Board and management work together to define strategic priorities which are owned by the Board and implemented by management (staff, teams, committees)

How to be a board member:

- Duty of Care—be informed, leave personal agenda behind, attend regularly
- Duty of Loyalty—Act in a manner that will not harm organization
- Duty of Obedience—Carry out the purpose of the organization

Four things councils should do:

- Set clear mission
- Be the carriers of the mission
- Set SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time specific) Goals
- Measure success/failure

Some best practices for Councils:

- Consent agenda on reports
- Minutes reflect a ministry that is advancing the kingdom
- A purpose is established for every meeting and meeting is evaluated on that purpose
- Board members know the mission and core values
- Primary focus of Council is monitoring the implementation of strategic initiatives and taking a long-view
- Leadership development is talked about and modeled in the Council meeting
- Council members are recruited for gifts they bring, not because they are the only willing person

Some Questions to ask after a Council meeting:

- Was the purpose of the meeting clearly articulated and did we accomplish that purpose?
- Were all Council members prepared for the meeting?
- Did Council members learn of (or share) the ways in which God is active in the church and world?
- Were outcome stories shared of the ministry with a plan to share those stories with all the members?
- Did we focus on strategic level initiatives or did we engage in the minutia?

Some things to think about (stories from Mike Ward's experience):

- A council was stuck on an issue over \$800. Some wanted to just stop what was taking place and freeze the event that was coming up that would have had broad outreach but was \$800 over budget. Nobody could find a way out of the situation until one member said "here is a \$100, if the rest of you give \$50 each, or a gift according to your means, I'm confident we can have the \$800 needed and just move on." --*Scarcity mentality had frozen the group until someone on the Council chose to lead and move the ministry forward.*
- A Council established a budget in the fall, then held a planning retreat in January to decide what to do this year. It turned out this congregation rarely accomplished anything new because there was never any money to accomplish new goals. --*A strategic plan gives guidance to what you should be funding and how to establish priorities.*
- A congregation identified that service to the community was a core value. However, if you looked at their budget, there was no service to the community listed. --*"Where your treasure is, your heart will be also" (Mt 6.21). Leadership needs to look at who they are and if in fact the organization is living out that identity. If not, that organization will begin to die.*
- A congregation couldn't figure out why they were shrinking. However, they had no growth goal or even a goal for first time visitors. How many first time visitors did you have last year (or last month). What is your goal for first time visitors? If the answer is you don't know or you don't have a goal for this, it is likely you will not grow, unless you get "lucky". --*We tend to be good at what we pay attention to. If we have a goal for first time visitors, we will implement tactics to achieve that goal. It is Council's job to establish and monitor the goal. It is a team of members of the congregation to take ownership of the goal to see that it is implemented.*

Suggested Reading:

Governance As Leadership, Reframing the Work of Non-Profit Boards: Richard Chait

Governance and Ministry: Dan Hotchkiss