A BIBLICAL GUIDE TO MAXIMIZING GREAT COMMISSION EMPHASIS BY
TRANSFORMING YOUR CHURCH GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRACT

A BIBLICAL GUIDE TO MAXIMIZING THE GREAT COMMISSION BY TRANSFORMING YOUR CHURCH GOVERNMENT

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After learning 3500-4000 churches close their doors each year, Ed Stetzer believes, “the church will not change until the pain of staying the same becomes greater than the pain of change.” This project will compare Congregation-led churches to Elder or Board-led churches to explore the need for changing the practical operation of the church in attempts to fulfill the Great Commission. The thoughts presented will provide a guide for church leaders, pastors, and church planters to adopt the style of governing policies that best results in for Jesus Christ. There will be fifty pastors polled from Congregation and Elder-led churches to gauge which style of government has the greatest potential for maximizing the Great Commission. The guide will offer church leaders a resource to lead their local churches to greater growth.

Abstract Length: 131 words
DEDICATION

To: Jesus. Without You, there would be no need for this project.

To: My wife, Rebecca and my daughter, Peyton. My wife has been a sounding board and encouragement throughout the doctoral program. Peyton, you are currently too young to remember daddy staying up late to write. However, thank you for going to bed early on many nights.

To: My parents and Rebecca’s parents, both sets of parents encouraged me to earn as much education as possible. I’m wondering what I can do next. Thank you for pushing me to this level.

To: Stuckey Baptist Church. Thank you for being there for me during my adolescent years. You will always be a special group of people near to my heart.

To: First Baptist Church of Big Stone Gap and Pinecrest Baptist Church, Dr. Garrett Sheldon and Rev. Thomas Potter. Thank you for seeing my passion for ministry and providing me the opportunity to advance my education while serving alongside of you.

To: Southern Baptists Conservatives of Virginia Staff: Don Cocks, David Bounds, Reggie Hester, Bethel Baptist Church of Chesapeake, Dr. Wanda Stewart, Joan Wood, and others. Thank you for giving me speaking opportunities, Starbucks chat sessions, ministry and marriage advice, scholarship recommendations, good times on and off the golf course, and just being there for your brother in Christ. This project, my ministry, and my spiritual walk have been greatly enhanced by your love.

To: Those who have challenged me to be a better person, husband, father and pastor. Those who have contributed to the loss of sleep and a few gray hairs because you made me think deeper, you know who you are!
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

In ten years of ministry, there is very little within a church that is surprising. Every pastor that has served in the ministry for any length of time has seen situations that are frustrating and discouraging. After seminary many young pastors enter their ministry with a desire to grow and build a church that will reach the world for Jesus. Their first church is the testing church; it tests to see how much patience the young pastor displays. Their second church may determine whether the young pastor will be in ministry for a lifetime, or if it will even be part of his life.

Somewhere between the beginning of this young minister’s first ministry position and the end of his second pastorate, he often finds himself in a situation that leaves him questioning his “call to ministry.” For three years in seminary, he was told to “preach the Word” and carry out the Great Commission. However, no one told him about the parking lot meetings with three deacons that represent the entire deacon board, who want him to leave “their” church. No one told him that he would be at the church four or five nights a week for meetings and while his little daughter is at home, wanting a story read or her good night prayers to be heard. When a young pastor ends his week having a frustrating, and possibly continuous, week at church, he may begin to believe there is something wrong with the mission of “Preaching the Word” and carrying out the Great Commission.

There are problems in many churches across America. It is no secret that churches are dying and lost people are going to Hell, but many church leaders think that they are doing well
because committees or ministry teams have met. It is there that the church in America has turned a mission from Jesus into a meeting machine, full of “their” agendas wrapped in church politics.

**The Statement of the Problem**

The problem runs a lot deeper than just an abundance of meetings. It can be summed up in one question, “Are churches being hindered by their policies and government to carry out the Great Commission?” To unpack this question, the lack of effectiveness in the church must be addressed.

Hiring staff can sometime be the most complex and frustrating hurdle that any church can undertake. These frustrations can stem from a debate over need versus the desires of the church body. McIntosh tells his readers, “Churches that have recently called a new staff member have revealed that many are hard-pressed to define a clear, reasonable rationale for doing so.”

Companies or churches that hire someone with an unclear job description will have a hard time keeping staff. Staff members will get frustrated and discouraged when they are unclear their role on a church staff.

Making the staff’s role and responsibility as clear as possible can help with frustration, however, it does not tell anyone if the church really needs someone in that position. A church that is gifted in music, but struggles in children’s ministry should not spend all their resources paying someone to lead worship. Positions are not clearly defined because churches are not sure what they really need versus what they want.

The unclear direction of a staff position leads to poor decisions. Instead of training someone from within to lead worship, many churches combine the position and hire someone to be the director of both music and children. The church has one person doing two jobs that

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require many hours of work. From experience, the combination position leads to a staff person being over worked and underappreciated.

Hiring staff is just one area the church of today is struggling to do effectively. There are other things that the church struggles with such as, planning events, follow-up and training the flock to do ministry. Churches are in a culture that is changing by the week and churches are struggling to find direction. Some may believe churches lack in visionary leaders, unaware of the direction churches need to be led. Visionary leaders address the struggles of churches while providing solutions and direction for improvement.

They struggle because of their lack of effectiveness and making good decisions. That lack the ability to make decisions causes a church to be faced with the challenge of time. Look at all the technology that has come about in the last twenty years: Facebook, Twitter and other media companies that are used to relay information to people have changed the way culture operates. If a church has to vote on having a website, there is no way a church can keep up with the race of time. The ability to keep up with the changing culture is getting extremely difficult.

The delays of having a church vote on decisions are frustrating and disheartening. There have been numerous times that churches have waited months to call a minister as their pastor. When they do finally call him, they are surprised to learn that he has taken a new position in another state. Many will say, “God just did not want this to work out.” However, the church missed out on God’s blessing because they wanted to meet and vote about receiving His blessing.

On the other side of this illustration are churches that make bad decisions costing them thousands of dollars and untold time. The money is not the most discouraging part about the equation; time is the most discouraging. On “Church Staffing” website, Kevin Marshall gives five tips on hiring a pastor, they are: hire an interim pastor, take your time in hiring a new senior
pastor, post a job listing on a church staffing website, establish a search committee to lead the pastor search, and then take a vote on the new pastor. Sounds simple in these terms, however, most members that serve on search committees know what they want, but they do not understand what the church needs or even worse, care what the church needs. They struggle with the correct process to find the person they desire to have on their church staff.

Consider the time element with a little more detail. In most Baptist churches, the church would have to vote on the interim pastor. After he begins, the church would vote on a search committee. Hopefully, the interim and the search committee would be voted on at the same time. The search committee meets two or three times to discuss their view and ideas about their next pastor. Do not forget that one committee member wants to hire the interim pastor that has already told the church he was not interested because of personal reasons. Then, the job is posted on a website with denomination related groups, seminaries and general websites. After thirty to sixty days of receiving résumés, the committee meets three more times to look at their best five candidates and set up phone interviews. After twenty days of phone interviews, they decide to bring in a pastor for a trial sermon. He is invited to their church three weeks later. The committee meets again and decides to call for a vote, which takes two weeks; then the vote has to be announced. If the vote goes well, the pastor will start in six weeks because of his current place in ministry. The committee met approximately seven to ten times and from beginning to end it took five months. This is a very conservative estimate. There have been some churches that have taken up to two years. At some point the people in the church, committee members and interim pastor become discouraged. The search committee makes a mistake by hiring someone

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too soon without following the recommended interview process. That is when the frustration of delaying turns into a bad decision.

Bad decisions can hinder, weaken, or even kill a church. At some point the church has to trust people that are in leadership roles. Every hurdle or challenge should not require a different set of people to make a decision. It seems that Baptist churches are famous for their food, meetings, politics and governing regulations in churches where leaders are restricted from leading. This thesis project will take it to the next level by discovering that the current polices and governing practices hinder the mission God has given the church.

The problem is not only the process the church uses to do business, but the results in reaching people with the gospel. Matthew 28:19-20, tells us to “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded.” The Southern Baptist Convention Mission Statement reads, “As a convention of churches, our missional vision is to present the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every person in the world and to make disciples of all the nations.” In the Bible and the largest denomination in America, the mission is the same. The question must be asked, “Is the mission of the local church the same as God’s?” Another question, “Are our man-made church policies and government hindering the mission?”

The mission must lead. The mission should be the vocal point when new churches are established. The mission must trump any other agenda in the church. The local church must understand that the mission is not an option for the survival of a church. The mission is the heartbeat of God’s desire. The mission is the grease that makes the churches wheels roll. When church members are meeting about church, they have lost the focus of the church’s mission. The

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church polices and government should support the mission by streamlining the business of the church, so members are more focused on reaching people and less on doing church.

**The Statement of Limitations**

In evaluating the process that churches take with their decision-making and their effectiveness in carrying out the Great Commission, the author cannot address every aspect of the process. There will be five key limitations during this project. The first limitation is the inability to create a perfect process that a church can follow to fulfill the Great Commission and produce growth. It is impossible because of the lack of knowing what God is going to bless. The church can produce the right decision-making and governing structure, but only God can produce growth in a church. Paul states, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase.”

The author is looking to make a better process of government to fulfill the Great Commission effectively. Second, the author will not allow his research to become a denominational debate. This research is taken from a cross section of denominations, but the effective system can be used universally as it will follow a biblical model. Third, the author is not addressing the historical or traditional reason these types of governments and policies were implemented in the church. The history of church policies will not promote current churches to become biblical and mission minded when there are large amounts of tradition within the history. Fourth, this system of government that will be outlined in later chapters will not produce disciples solely. A church must have leaders that are passionate about reaching and disciplining people regardless; the governing polices makes disciples more effective. Fifth, for the purpose of this paper Elder-led or Board-led churches are seen as the same type of governing styles with different titles.

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4 1 Corinthians 3:6 (NKJV).
Theoretical Basis for the Project

This project will cover the three major theoretical fields: biblical, theological, and historical. As the author began to cover the amount of information relating church governing and growth, it was clear that the two topics have a lot in common. How the church operates or conducts decisions affect the growth of the church. People are not drawn to churches that are slow at making decisions or uneducated in their decisions.

Biblical

In the first few chapters of the book of Acts, Luke gives his reader an understanding of the biblical structure of a church. Acts 2:14, Luke shows that Peter stood up with the eleven and spoke to those who dwell in Jerusalem indicating that Peter was the main leader in the early church. Peter was the preacher standing behind the pulpit; however, there were other leaders that did not preach that day. Peter was the leader of the leaders.

Readers of Acts will see this again in Acts 14:23, “When they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.” The word “elder” is plural, meaning there was more than one in each church. This meant there was more than one teacher, more than one overseer, more than just one equipper of the saints.

In chapters two through fourteen of Acts, the church in Jerusalem was growing daily. In chapter six, the apostles or early church elders that saw the resurrection of Jesus, ran into people complaining about the daily welfare of the widows of the church. They decided to make another position in the church, the deacons. The twelve elders agreed, “it is not desirable that we should leave the Word of God and serve tables.” The deacons were born out of a need of service. They are defined as servants of the church, not the overseers or preachers.
Theological

Church government and church growth are both found in the doctrine of ecclesiology. Church government is the process of how the body of believers makes a decision. Some churches believe in electing leaders to fill committees or ministry teams that bring items to a church wide meeting to be voted upon. Many churches have a leadership team or eldership governing body that makes decisions on all matters except major decisions. Other churches take a congregational vote on every item.

Church growth is the study of the increase or decrease of the number of people in church. Most of the time church growth is focused on numbers; however, church growth could refer to the depth of a church’s faith or their spiritual growth. A church grows in numbers and by spiritual depth. Jesus communicates that spiritual depth is an ongoing process as He tells His disciples to, “deny himself, and take up his cross daily.”⁵ Then in Acts 2:47, people are being “added to the church daily” as an indication that God’s wants the church to grow spiritually and numerically.

Church government and growth goes together because of Jesus’ mission. Jesus established the church with a mission to reach people and provide a place of fellowship with other believers. The progression of church growth impacts the governing style or layout of the leadership. In Acts, when the church grew, they added more recognized leaders. The deacons served as a group of men that helped the apostles carry out the physical welfare of the church.

During the early stages of the church, the separation between physical and spiritual welfare was a church governing strategy for growth. Sharing the responsibility of ministering to people gave leaders an opportunity to minister at a higher level of energy. The apostles were not pulled into food bank and shut-in ministries. They focused on praying for and with the people

and preaching. This separation of responsibilities established a structure for governing and a platform for growth.

God desires the church to be structured with some type of governing policy. In today’s culture, people desire to have everything done their own way, but God’s way is done with order. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 14: 33 and 40, “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints … Let all things be done decently and in order.” Paul gave these orders to a church that was disorganized and needed some structure. Some interpret this to mean the worship service on Sunday morning; however, God is involved in all aspects of the church. Whether the church is meeting for worship, business meeting or a nursery meeting, God wants us to come together with order and respect for His house, ministry and flock.

Historical

The revolutionary change in church government took place when Martin Luther challenged the church with his 95 Theses in 1517. Martin Luther and his followers would reject the spiritual authority of the Pope and embrace the theology known as the priesthood of all believers. This gave the church members an opportunity to voice their opinion. From the beginning of the protestant church, pastors and leaders have struggled with members’ control and leaders’ control.

Because of this struggle many churches became insecure and lacked trust in each other. Rules have been put into place to bring back a sense of security among believers. Some churches today require people to be members one year before they can teach or serve on a committee. Some churches will not let members become deacons until two years have passed. These are typical rules that have been put into place for a sense of security or from an attitude of protecting the church.

6 1 Corinthians 14: 33,40 (NKJV).
These rules have increased in the last one hundred years, creating more walls between people and discouraging a focus on the Great Commission. The focus on church government and the lack of focus on missions has led the church into a major decline. It is claimed that this decline in churches has happened because of a culture shift. The culture is shifting in an obvious way that no one can deny. Each year people join churches that have never been involved in a previous church. Unchurched people will increase, and as they become followers of Jesus, the church must work extra hard to disciple them. When people are discipled and understand their role in the local church, fewer divisions will take place and growth will happen.

Thom S. Rainer does not believe a cultural shift is the sole reason for church decline. “The number one reason for the decline in church attendance is that members attend with less frequency than they did just a few years ago.” Rainer is basically pointing out the way churches calculate attendance indicates if the church is declining by a few or a lot. If you do the math, he has a good point. However, the five ways to address the decline should be noted in the history of church growth and government, see below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 Five Ways to Address Church Decline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Raise the expectation of membership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Require an entry class for membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage ministry involvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Offer more options for worship times</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitor attendance of each member</td>
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</tbody>
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Many churches struggle with the expectations of their membership. Many church leaders will claim that a church cannot hold a volunteer to expectations. However, higher expectations require an accountability guideline. When people know they need to do a task in the church, they will do that task to the best of their ability. Very few churches outline or define those expectations to their members.

The best way to communicate these expectations is through a membership class. As soon as a person shows interest in becoming a member of the church, the leadership should encourage the prospective members to attend the membership class. In this membership class, individuals should learn how the church operates. This is where prospective members will receive a copy of the bylaws and other documentations.

Encouraging members to be involved in the ministry helps inform members of how the church operates. There have been many cases where members never got involved and never attended a membership class, so they are clueless as to how things are done. Churches must inform their members of how ministry is going to be operated in their church.

**Statement of Methodology**

This thesis attempts to create a manual for pastors, church plants and other church leaders to help them transition their church to a form of government that will promote and encourage fulfilling the Great Commission. Churches are called to be mission minded. To keep this the focus of the church, members cannot get wrapped up in a lot of rules and regulations to achieve what God has commissioned them to do. The government and policies of a church should not restrict the church from keeping its focus on reaching and training people to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Chapter One will cover the biblical and theological parameters for church growth and government. Chapter Two will consist of an overview of the two most popular church
government styles. In Chapter Three, church growth will be examined in contrast with church
government. In Chapter Four, the results of the surveys will be presented as well as the best style
of government that gives churches the best opportunity to carry out the Great Commission.
Chapter Five is the manual that helps leaders move their church to a government style that
focuses on making disciples and growing the local church.

The problem is churches are overwhelmed by a leadership structure that includes many
committees and endless meetings just to make one decision. The longer the bylaws of a church,
the more complex the operation becomes; however, this does not mean the church is bigger. A
church with a more complex operation spends more time following their rules and less time
making disciples. The mission that Jesus gave the church should be fulfilled in everything that
the church does. The question will be answered, "Does the bylaws, government or operating
policies help or hinder the local church from fulfilling the Great Commission”.

In Chapter One, the problem has been introduced to the reader and a brief understanding
can be gained about the project. The limitations of the project were defined to give the reader a
greater understanding. The biblical and historical knowledge of church government in
relationship to church growth was presented in the theoretical section. The writer has reviewed
over 30 sources from current books and sources that relate to this project that will enlighten the
reader about the subject.

In Chapter Two, the reader will learn about the two mainstream types of church
government. Congregationalist and Elder-led have been the two most popular styles of church
government in America. These two styles will be explained in great detail, so the reader can
understand how they function. Their strengths and weaknesses will be exposed to understand the
type of people who support or discourage the respected governing styles.
In Chapter Three, the reader will learn more about the relationship between church government and growth. The type of government will determine what size a church can become. Many churches have set limits on their growth because of their policies. This chapter will examine what type of government eliminates barriers so churches can grow. A large portion of this chapter will look at how America and the states, mainly Virginia, play a part in the growth of a church.

In Chapter Four, the shift from church government to the Great Commission takes place. This chapter will contain most of the data from the surveys. The leader’s confidence in their church’s government will determine if they are willing to lead the church to grow. The common denominators found in growing churches will be discussed. Then, the way a growing church’s government operates will be explained.

Chapter Five is the “so what” chapter. In this chapter, the researcher will share his knowledge about how to transition a church’s by-laws from a politically driven focus to a Great Commission focus. Changing something in a church, like the by-laws, can create a lot of problems and may even cost a pastor his job. A major transition such as changing the church’s by-laws has to be done with prayer, patience and for the correct reason.

**Review of the Literature**

Thabiti M. Anyabwile took another book’s idea, *What is a Healthy Church?* and applied his thoughts to the church member. Anyabwile writes, "The health of a local church may ride exclusively on the membership's response to the church's leadership. How the congregation receives or rejects its leaders has a direct effect on the possibilities of faithful ministry and church health." He makes it clear that a healthy church member

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will follow the leaders of the church. The members who are not willing to follow the leader have two options. First, they can leave the local church they currently attend to find a church where they can follow the leadership. Second, they can create conflict by trying to change the leadership. The first option is always better than the second one. Anyabwile explains, "Rather, healthy members of a local church should strive and encourage others to strive to follow their leaders with wide-open hearts, eager obedience, and joyful submission."¹⁰

Many churches that reject a biblical form of church government have a hard time with a solo group of leadership. With a church-led by elders, the member must trust and follow the lead of the elders. So many bad stories of pastors and elders ruling as dictators have turned churches off from the biblical concept of elder leadership. Churches that transform their church government from Congregation-led to Elder-led must understand the biblical roles of the church members and elders.

Thom S. Rainer, like Anyabwile, wrote a book addressing the most common attitudes of church members. In I am a Church Member, Rainer writes, "I am suggesting that congregations across America are weak because many of us church members have lost the biblical understanding of what it means to be a part of the body of Christ."¹¹ Rainer uses 1 Corinthians 12-14 to illustrate how Paul promoted church members to work together in unity so that God can be glorified and the church can attract unbelievers.

Rainer points out the attitude differences in the biblical church membership and many church members. Many people today, Rainer explains, are looking at churches for what they can

¹⁰ Ibid., 103.

¹¹ Thom S. Rainer, I am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude that Makes the Difference (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2013), 5.
get out of it. Church was never designed for people to be the main focus. The focus should be an attitude of glorifying God by doing what is best for the church. A biblical model of church membership is forsaking personal desires for a biblical model.

Church policies and government has been a personal preference for years. Some churches or denominations are formed because they wanted a different way of running their church. Many denominational splits have happened over church government. Churches need to adopt a biblical church membership view in transforming their church government to a biblical way and focus on reaching people rather than satisfying personal preferences.

Julia Duin was concerned about the future of the church when she began to search for reasons why people are leaving church. In her book, Quitting Church: Why the Faithful are Fleeing and What to do About it, Duin claims that "This book is an attempt to get at the roots of these problems, understand why people are bailing out, and offer some ideas - my own and those of others - on what would bring them back." Duin offers ideas of how to bring people back into the church that are overlooked at times.

Duin suggested that churches are overlooking ministries that matter. Duin points out those churches are fleeing from single's ministries or women's ministries because they feel they cannot compete with larger mega churches. However, Duin points out that mega churches do not reach a large percentage of singles. Why are singles graduating from high school or college and then disappearing from the churches?

Duin is trying to answer this question, and it is one of the questions trying to be answered in this thesis. Why are people leaving the church? Are people fed up with the complexity of church government and policy? Are people fed up with a preacher asking his congregation to

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12 Julia Duin, Quitting Church: Why the Faithful are Fleeing and What to do About It (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), 23.
share their faith, but has to vote on doing a mission project in their neighborhood? There are reasons why people are leaving churches and church policy or government is a major reason.

In *Doing Church as a Team: The Miracle of Teamwork and How it Transforms Churches*, Wayne Cordeiro encourages his readers to revisit the biblical idea of teamwork in the local church. He strongly contends for the idea that every Christian should be a minister, not just the professional paid staff. "Doing church as a team is merely a return to the way God designed the church to function. The ministry of the church is not the responsibility of a few professionals; it is the divine responsibility of every one of us."[13] This is true in many churches in America. The church has been spoiled to believe that they can just pay someone to do their responsibilities.

Cordeiro’s book relates to this thesis’s topic in the context of Congregational-led and Elder-led churches in many ways. A Congregational-led church can have the tendency to vote someone to do their work, such as an evangelism committee and have the impression that only the committee is required to witness to people. In Elder-led churches, the congregation may expect the elders to do all the teaching, when the gift of teaching can be given to anyone. Cordeiro reminds his reader that everyone in the church has God given responsibilities regardless of their leadership position, pushing people to be involved as a team.

George Barna, like always, has provided a lot of information about growing your church in his book titled "*Grow your church from the Outside In*". Barna states, "We take the first step toward truly preparing to reach the unchurched when we become living representations of His intended Church, models of faithfulness, obedience, holiness and righteousness. God's Church is not about structures, systems and resources; it is about individual people and our relationship.

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with God." This statement seems like it would contradict this thesis, however, Barna underestimated the fact that the people that are to "become living representation of His intended church" are the same people that develop the structures and systems that governs the church.

In agreement with the first part of this statement, the unchurched are looking for believers who will display a conviction to model faithfulness and obedience. Believers are not being obedient when they form church policy or government that has no biblical foundation. The church policy or government cannot be based on tradition or what forefathers of denominations set in place. Later in this thesis, there will be a biblical church governing system.

George Barna states in *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches*, "Highly effective churches cannot be agencies of transformation unless they are structured to facilitate effectiveness. Since every church has a different vision, different resources and different ministry opportunities, the exact nature of the structure and operational mode differs." The structure and operation has to be different as churches grow. A church of 100 people will operate differently than a church of 1,000. There are many different ways a church will carry out their policies, but churches cannot allow their method to hinder their mission.

This thesis writer’s concern is that the mission of the church is hindered by the method of carrying out the Great Commission. There are many churches that are frustrated with each other because their ministries are going nowhere due to the fact their focus is on the structure and not on the mission. Churches cannot hold to a structure that hinders their mission or they will die.

The Great Commission is all about reaching and developing people into disciples of Jesus Christ. George Barna understands the importance of training people to be true disciples for the

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sake of the future church. In *Growing True Disciples*, he states, "If we can get people to attend worship services, pay for the church's buildings and salaries, and muster positive, loving attitudes toward one another and toward the world, we often feel that's good enough."\(^{16}\) This is not enough, he continues, "When you are a true disciple of Jesus Christ, you will bear fruit worthy of a follower of the risen Lord."\(^{17}\) That the goal of the Great Commission, to train people to serve and love the things of God, also known as, witnessing to more people.

Many churches try to please their own desires that lead down a road of church death. The church must consider a biblical model for church governing enhancing their effectiveness of the Great Commission. Henry T. Blackaby writes in *A God Centered Church: Experiencing God Together*, from the perspective of people longing for something more in their relationship with Jesus. "They have accepted Christ into their lives but don't seem to know what to do next. They hear other(s) talking about abundant life in Christ, but abundant life seems to be just beyond their grasp."\(^{18}\) As Blackaby explains the early church came together to grow in their faith, a great example of a church that was centered on experiencing God together. Church should be more focused on their relationship with Jesus and less on the structure of government. However, some church structures promote more focus on its government and less on experiencing God.

Blackaby sees the leaders of the local church as equippers. "Some churches see the leader's task as primarily evangelism or soul winning. But that is not true in the New Testament."\(^{19}\) Blackaby believes the leaders should be equipping the people in the church for the


\(^{17}\) Ibid., 29.


\(^{19}\) Ibid., 211.
work of the ministry. The leaders of the church should be the focused on training members and the members should be focused on following their leaders who are following Jesus. Everyone cannot be a leader and every church needs leaders who are training its members.

In *Why Churches Die: Diagnosing Lethal Poisons in the Body of Christ*, Mac Brunson and Ergun Caner look at thirteen reasons why churches die by using personal and biblical illustrations. There are many churches in a decline or dying in America. Brunson gives an illustration from a previous ministry where the church was in a disagreement because of changes to the by-laws. These changes led some people to bitterness and anger toward future pastors who had nothing to do with the changes. This bitterness killed their church because they took their focus off the Great Commission.

In a later chapter of this thesis there will be a section on key concepts to transition churches from one governing style to another. This church of bitterness needed to understand key principals in transferring to new by-laws or other major changes in their church. Changing a church is not an overnight process; it takes time and patience. Many pastors and leaders have moved too fast, making people uncomfortable and upset with the change. Brunson and Caner convey this in multiple chapters.

Bill Hull has always been focused on missions and growing disciples to enhance the Kingdom of God. Hull writes in his book, *The Disciple-Making Church* that "Unless the church makes making disciples its main agenda, world evangelism is a fantasy."\(^{20}\) Making the Great Commission the main focus is the key to the local church. The two concepts of the Great Commission must be present in any church. There must be those that are being reached, however, there must be people to reach the unbeliever. Developing disciples that will reach

other people must happen for the church to develop more disciples. When people experience God's grace they have a desire for others to feel the same love.

This statement from Hull is a great way to express the need for the church to reach the world for Jesus. To reach the world, there must be discipleship training going on in the local church. If the church is not producing disciples, there is no way for them to send out well trained people to reach the world. In this thesis, the writer is trying to convey the importance of streamlining the church operation, policy and government for the sake of the gospel.

In Being Leaders, Aubery Malphurs states, "The elders were the pastors of the churches in the first century and were likely the pastors of the house churches. Therefore it's not wrong, as some argue, to have a single leader of a local church that is probably today's equivalent of a house church." Many agree that appears to give a lot of freedom on the church operation. There is no sample manual of operation in the New Testament; however, it does give us a lot about the leadership of the church.

Single pastoral or eldership leadership is far from being a biblical model of New Testament leadership. Acts 20:17 states, "From Miletus he (Paul) sent to Ephesus and called for the elders of the church." This verse and others in the book of Acts indicate that there are multiple elders ministering at each church. Many times in the New Testament the word elder is in the plural form, elders, when referring to the leadership of the New Testament. The way a church views this concept of plural or single eldership will determine how their church will be governed.

Many churches struggle with the concept of teamwork because people have the mindset of hierarchy. John C. Maxwell reminds Christians in The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork

that church is about working together with a common goal and vision in mind. He uses seventeen laws that relate to teamwork. Some of these laws are outlined in some of his other leadership concepts, like The Law of the Big Picture and some are not, like The Law of the Bad Apple. The Bad Apple is the rotten attitude of team players that will pull other team members down with them. Team players should strive to build each other up with a positive attitude. Maxwell points out that the perspective of a situation can alternate that attitude for the good or for bad.

To keep a church fresh with good ideas people have to think well and learn how to think of new and fresh ideas. John C. Maxwell teaches people to think successful with fresh, visionary ideas in his book titled, *How Successful people think: Change you Thinking, Change your Life*. Maxwell explains how to change one’s thinking in order to turn his/her actions into success.

The Big-Picture Thinking" is something that every leader should know and apply to their thinking for a church to move forward. Maxwell explains, "Whether building roads, planning a trip, or moving in leadership, big-picture thinking allows you to enjoy more success. People who are constantly looking at the whole picture have the best chance of succeeding in any endeavor.22

Churches are greatly affected by the staff that they hire. Some staff members will add to the church and others will make the church suffer. Gary McIntosh wrote a book about hiring staff that will help churches grow. In *Staff Your Church for Growth: Building Team Ministry in the 21st Century*, McIntosh states,

Someone has said there are two types of staff members—racehorses and mules. Racehorses are creative people who do not know what it means to say something cannot be done ... Whereas you have to let racehorses run, you have to stay on top of mules every minute. I do not know about you, but most leaders

would rather have racehorses on their staff than mules. Mules must be prodded but racehorses are self-starters. Look for racehorses!²³

Racehorses are needed on every church for them to move forward. The church of today must have leadership that is pro-active, always looking for an opportunity to minister to people. Racehorses do just that, they are looking for ways to reach and teach more people. By their pro-active ways, they will fulfill that Great Commission by getting out of the walls of the church. Churches, by their nature demand a racehorse to drive ministry to growth.

_The Baptist Deacon_ written by Robert E. Naylor in 1955, shows its age when referring to ministries that have been out dated for thirty or more years. Naylor has an entire chapter on the deacon and church administration. In this chapter, he writes, "Both the deacons and the committee, however, are meant to carry out the expressed policies of the church. The budget is the expressed will of the church concerning the distribution of funds."²⁴

In _On Being a Pastor_, Derek Prime and Alistar Begg include fourteen areas of a pastor’s life and ministry that should be understood and applied to every pastor's life. There are several things that are surprising about this book. Very little is said about the pastor being the leader of the church. The involvement of the pastor in the governing affairs of the church was not covered.

David Platt questions a lot of the American Christian ways by writing _Radical Together_, a book that ask churches to question everything they do.

The ways we minister to children, youth, and college students; how we serve women, men, singles, married, and seniors; how we do music and missions; how we approach and implement finances and budgets, administration and communication; all our policies, priorities, and procedures; all the buildings and

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land we own or rent - all these things (and more) belong on the table. The gospel compels the church to go to God with everything we have and everything we do and then ask, ‘What needs to go? What needs to change? What needs to stay the same?’

These are good questions when discussing church government in the context of the Great Commission. To apply these questions to the context, the same question should be asked. What in church governing needs to change to be able to reach more people? What in church governing is promoting a Great Commission mind set? Is the Great Commission the center of churches governing systems? Is churches’ business meeting consumed with God’s purpose for the local church?

In *High Expectations*, Thom S. Rainer is writing on his research that was taken from churches that expressed high levels of expectations from their members and ministry. Sunday school is one of the areas where these churches have high expectations. Sunday school teachers in these churches made a covenant to prepare their lesson each week and meet on Wednesdays to discuss the lesson. They set goals for their classes, and established a new class each year. Each class would have care groups and an outreach leader to keep them focused on reaching the lost. Teachers and other leaders would covenant to arrive early each week to greet people. These covenants were signed each year and every teacher was expected to follow their committee.

Thom S. Rainer includes fourteen lessons from the 287 churches that his team surveyed. The most encouraging point is his first point, "A Few Churches Have Unique Leaders”, Rainer writes in this point, "It is erroneous to think, however, only a few unique leaders can lead churches to be exciting and evangelistic churches. Other pastors have different leadership styles.

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that can still make a difference.”

Rainer encourages every pastor to be a leader that makes a difference. Pastors cannot sit on the sideline and wait for a committee to decide the direction of the church. The pastor is the leader; he must lead with high expectations for himself and church members.

If one is to fully understand the concept of church government and its relationship to a growing church, he/she must examine verses and text from the Bible. Every church has traditions that have been established by an understanding or a lack of understanding. The church must understand what God desires His church to look like before developing an opinion about a church under His leadership and authority.

The two passages that are very important when looking at the commands to reach people with the gospel are Acts 1:7-8 and Matthew 28:18-20. Matthew’s passage is traditionally referred to as the Great Commission. Matthew records Jesus telling those around him to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” The word “go” indicates that people need to travel or go beyond their local area. However, some have interpreted this to mean, “as you go”, make disciples. Luke, the writer of Acts, indicates that the Great Commission includes locations beyond the surrounding areas. Regardless of location, believers should be going to where the unbelievers are to share the gospel with them.

Matthew adds those famous words, “make disciples” to his account that indicates something more than just saying a prayer. Making disciples has been defined several different ways. It can be summed up as a continuous effort to move people closer to Jesus in every conversation. Making disciples is not just leading someone in a prayer but it is a journey

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believers are called on to take with others as they encourage each other to become stronger in their faith.

Notice in Acts 1:8, Jesus is already placing His audience in the position of being “witnesses” for His name sake. Matthew understands the mission of making disciples and Luke is commanded show the world what Jesus can do in the life of a believer. A witness is seen as a person who speaks on behalf of another. This would explain why believers are called Christians or “little Christ.” Believers are to duplicate the actions and motives of Jesus Christ. By their actions they are to show the world what Jesus has done in their lives for the purpose of sharing the gospel with those who are unbelievers.

These two passages are the most important passages in relation to church growth. All growing churches must have a high percentage of people that are becoming new believers in Christ. These people find out about the love of Jesus from others in the church. Churches that have members who are soul winners usually have a high number of new converts. The focus must stay on the Great Commission or churches will turn inward and focus too much on themselves.

As time progressed in the young church, Peter become the spokesmen for the group in Acts Chapter 1. He preaches a powerful sermon in Chapter 2 of Acts and “many were added daily.”27 The increase of believers demanded a lot more of the young preachers and in Acts 6; they were looking for help.

Now in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution. Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, “It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over

this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.  

This is the beginning of church government. Servants were established to help with the daily overload of duties that related to the physical wellbeing of believers. These men were selected by their reputation and spiritual maturity. Notice, they were “appointed over this business” meaning their position was an elected position and their job was part of the ministry business. Their position would be called “deacon” later in history.

The position of the pastor has been a dividing topic when it comes to church government. Job description has a lot to do with job title, see below for the job titles of a pastor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Titles</th>
<th>Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bishop</td>
<td>Philippians 1:1, 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:7, 1 Peter 2:25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastor/Shepherd</td>
<td>Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2, Ephesians 4:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preacher</td>
<td>1 Corinthians 14:3; 15:1-3, Acts 8:5, Romans 10:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Acts 2:42, 1 Timothy 4:13, 2 Timothy 3:14, Matthew 28:19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servant</td>
<td>1 Peter 5:2, Titus 1:1, Matthew 20:25-28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messenger</td>
<td>Revelation 2-3, each church had a messenger</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most every church relates this passage to the first election or appointing of deacons in the early church. Their duties and qualifications are large factors in this view. When SBC churches define deacons, they commonly use this passage to provide a job description. This passage has been the underlining foundation to show the separation of church offices. It provides a structure where elders take care of preaching and prayer or spiritual things, and deacons handle feeding people or physical things.

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Later in 1 Peter 5:1-4, Peter claimed to be an elder and encouraged his audience to support their elders. He commands the elders to “shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.” This passage confirms that the elders’ duties are to be devoted to spiritual things as an overseer.

Everyone who studies church government has to take into consideration the qualifications and tasks of the Elders. See below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1 Timothy 3:14     | Blameless  
husband of one wife  
temperate  
sober-minded  
good behavior, hospitable  
able to teach  
not given to wine  
not violent  
not greedy  
gentle  
not quarrelsome  
not covetous  
rules his own house well  
children in submission with all  
reverence                                                                 |
| 1 Timothy 5:17-18  | Labor in the word and doctrine                                                                                                                     |
| Titus 1:5-9        | Blameless  
husband of one wife  
faithful children  
steward of God  
not self-willed  
not quick-tempered  
not given to wine  
not violent  
not greedy for money  
hospitable  
love of what is good  
sober-minded  
just  
holy  
self-controlled  
holding fast the faithful word  
as he has been taught  
sound doctrine\textsuperscript{30}                                             |

\textsuperscript{30} 1 Timothy 3:14, 1 Timothy 5:17-18, Titus 1:5-9 (NKJV).
Table 4 Elder’s Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Support</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acts 6:1-7</td>
<td>Give self continually to prayer and ministering the word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Peter 5:1-4</td>
<td>Shepherd the flock of God which is among you serving as overseers not as being lords over those entrusted to you example to the flock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 14:23</td>
<td>Prayed with fasting, commended to the Lord</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ephesians 4:11-13</td>
<td>Equip the Saints edify the body of Christ(^\text{31})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After understanding the different job titles of an Elder, along with his qualifications and tasks, other Bible passages should be examined to just how he functioned in the early church. Titus 1:5 states, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you.” This verse provides insightful understanding about Elders. First, every town should have elders. Some would interpret that all the pastors in one town should be part of one big Elder board. This provided an opportunity for each church to work together. The idea of a large Elder board in each town from different churches is highly unlikely. Second, most of the cities in the first century only had one church, so this verse points to a pluralistic eldership in each church or each town. Because of this verse, a pluralistic eldership view in every church can be supported. However, consider the following, “Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren

dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.\textsuperscript{32}

How the deacons and elders functioned in the first century church is completely different from most churches today. In this passage from Acts 11, "the disciples" could have been deacons and other believers that would have helped with the aid of those affected by the famine. Notice, these deacons found a need and met the need. No discussion was required for them to meet a need. They were looking out for the welfare of other believers around them.

The elders did not cast lots or vote on the disciples fulfilling this need. They were informed of the need, but Barnabas and Saul, as disciples, would report their progress in ministry to their leader. Their leaders were notified that the Elders were doing their job. This notification took very little time and no discussion, but that was the deacons and disciples job. The overseer was told about the situation and that it was being handled. Both the deacons and elders understood their duties and responsibilities, making the task easy with little or no conflict.

In Acts 14:23-28, the apostles "appointed elders in every church, and praying with fasting they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed." These verses show that every church had Elders - a pluralistic leadership. The elders where selected in a special manner of praying with fasting as the apostles commended them to the Lord.

When the apostles or elders arrived at Antioch, "where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed”, they gather together at church for a service of testimonies. The elders were part of this testimonial service, where believers expressed what God has been doing in their lives. This must have taken place for a few days because "they stayed there a long time with the disciples."

\textsuperscript{32} Acts 11:28-30 (NKJV).
In Acts 15:1-5, the elders were present to listen to a theological issue that rose up among believers. The debate over circumcision once again surfaced, but this time it was heard by the apostles and elders. Paul’s letters indicate that he was involved in making the case that salvation is by faith alone. However, the elders had an impact on this decision. Remember, apostles and elders are seen together many times in the New Testament.

The elders’ role in this situation is extremely important in showing the church and outsiders that church leaders are unified on circumcision.

Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren. They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings. Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, “You must be circumcised and keep the law” —to whom we gave no such commandment— it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.33

The unity among the leaders set the tone for the rest of the believer’s during this theological concern. The letter was addressed from apostles, elders and the brethren who were all leaders involved in this decision. There were about thirteen or fourteen apostles at that time. There could have been as many as seventy Elders from each town. No one knows how many brethren were present or agreed with the letter, so in total, a conservative count would be in the nineties. Everyone knew where the early church stood on circumcision when these men came out of their meeting. They sent the letter and the world saw the unity among the church leaders. The letter told of their position in

33 Acts 15:22-29 (NKJV)
writing, so no one could deny or change their position. As a core group, the elders lead the way in presenting themselves in unison with the respected apostles.

These are just a few passages and verses from the New Testament that tell how important the Great Commission is in Jesus’ eyes. The other passages and verses examined in this section show how elders came about in the early church. These are not the only verses in the Bible that discuss directly the Great Commission or church government. There are several ideas, such as Congregational-led churches, that will be discussed in later chapters at the proper time. Throughout these passages, the Great Commission is seen as top priority. Then, as the church grew, a structure was formed to disciple all the people that were coming to know and trust in Jesus.
CHAPTER TWO

OVERVIEW OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT

There are many variations of church government within each mainstream church government idea. In his book, *Church Government from Systematic Theology*, Wayne Gruden states, “Within local churches, Baptists often have a single pastor with a board of deacons, but some have a board of elders as well. Presbyterians have a board of elders and Episcopalians have a vestry. Other churches simply have a church board.”\(^1\) Take for example Southern Baptist Churches. Some SBC churches are elder governed; others will not even acknowledge elders in their church. Many SBC churches operate by the majority of the church’s vote. Giving everyone a say in every decision they make. Within the Elder-led and Congregational-led models there are many variations. Elmer L. Towns believes there are three types of government, “In contemporary society, there are three basic expressions of local church authority, i.e., (1) episcopal, (2) representative, and (3) congregational.”\(^2\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind:</th>
<th>Congregational</th>
<th>Representative</th>
<th>Episcopal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authority:</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>Board</td>
<td>Man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strengths:</td>
<td>Church decides</td>
<td>Stability</td>
<td>Takes fullest advantage of gifted leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>together-unity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaknesses:</td>
<td>Lack of direction</td>
<td>Rationalistic</td>
<td>Poor leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophy:</td>
<td>Democratic</td>
<td>Representative,</td>
<td>Monarchy(^3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Republic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\(^3\) Ibid., 660.
This chart gives a good idea of the contrast between the three types. The two ideas of Congregation-led and Elder-led will be explored in this chapter. In the Elder-led model, churches differ on how the elders are selected. Some churches require the current elders to replace themselves with a qualified individual, where other churches go through a selection process of voting on different qualified individuals. Some eldership governed churches set restrictions on the eldership. Some Elder-led churches have few limitations on their leaders. Qualifications to be an elder sometimes vary greatly from church to church. The common theme is still the same; there is a core group that carries out the mission of the church.

In congregation-led, the majority runs the church. It’s common to have a deacon board, committees and pastor(s) as core leadership structure. However, many decisions still have to go before the church in a church business meeting for the entire church to approve. The church votes on new carpet, budgets, buildings, spending money, hiring and firing staff and the list never stops. In a true Congregation-led church, the church makes every decision by voting on every item of discussion. The concept of the church voting on every item or topic has been modified in many churches around the world. Many churches with over 300 active members have streamlined this process and limit what is taken before the church for a vote.

Churches vary in church government for many different reasons. Denominations play a large part in the structure of churches. The background of the church planter that starts the church has a lot to do with church government, because they most likely wrote the church’s first by-laws. Their background and experience is intertwined with the way the founding members envisioned the church to operate. The concept of elders in the local church is first found in Acts Chapter 11:27-30.
And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.4

As Claudius Caesar was managing the consequences of a great famine, the New Testament Church took action to help its brethren in Judea. The elders sent Barnabas and Saul back with “relief”, showing there was a group decision to provide aid. The next time “elders” were mentioned was in Lystra, Iconium and Antioch. Acts Chapter 14:21-23 says,

And when they had preached the gospel to that city and made many disciples, they returned to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God.” So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.5

**Congregationalists**

Change in the local church is only good if the end product has benefited the church to carry out the desires of God more effectively and efficiently. Many changes in the local church have come from a reaction to circumstances or situations and not from true conviction. Changing because of personal preference can lead to a people pleasing mindset in the local church. Movements in history have been forged by conviction, not personal preference.

**History/Biblical Rational**

It was no different during the Reformation. Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, Thomas Cranmer and others led the break from the Catholic Church with conviction desiring to have independence from the Catholic Church structure. Thomas Cranmer was a close follower of

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5 Acts 14:21-23 (NKJV).
Martin Luther, learning how to handle the differences between the Protestant and Catholic Tradition. "Cranmer wrote the hugely important *Book of Common Prayer*, the collection of prayers and liturgies for use in the English churches. The fact that this was written in English rather than Latin was radical enough, but the book also lacked many ‘Catholic’ features, such as representing the Eucharist as a sacrifice." Cranmer looked to take control away from the state controlled Catholic leaders by providing basic prayers and literature in the language of the people. The leaders during the reformation wanted to educate the people so they did not depend entirely on the Catholic Church.

**Biblical Support**

Most people would agree that the Congregation-led church was born with Martin Luther and the Reformation. Martin Luther wanted the church to be independent and autonomous. Luther looked to break away from the Catholic control and provide each local church an opportunity to make decisions. After the Reformation, churches had more freedom to rule themselves. This put the power back in the people’s hands, power that would be misused and taken advantage of. According to Steven H. Ware Bailey,

> Congregationalism in American began in the seventeenth century as an English Puritan movement within the larger Reformed Calvinist tradition. The Congregationalists of early New England took seriously their resolve both to purify the church and to transform the whole of society to reflect the model set forth in. To address their mission those Congregationalists assessed the religious and secular situation in which they found themselves and, trusting God’s providence, acted accordingly.⁷

Bailey is a member and writer of the NACCC (National Association of Congregational Christian Churches), whose practice focuses on historical evidence rather than to state its

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opinion. Harry R. Butman, another writer for NACCC, states, “It will (Congregational) specifically honor the Headship of Christ in each local gathered church.” Most Bible believing churches will state this in their by-laws. It is common knowledge that Christ is the head of the Church. That was settled with Luther and the Reformation. The question is, “Who is the leader that Christ gives the vision of the church to?”

The Headship of Christ teaches, “That Christ is the head of the church most naturally comports with a congregational understanding of church government.” This is a biblical concept to support the idea of no outside authority rules over a local church, but it does not tell the congregation who is the earthly leader. Congregationalists have used the Headship of Christ since the Reformation as their primary biblical support.

A secondary biblical support is found in 1 Peter 2:9, “the Priesthood of the Believer.” The concept is absolutely biblical in its nature. “Congregationalism asserts that the youngest believer, the least humble church member, has a God-given right to have a voice and a vote in determining the direction of the church.” The power and influence of God in every believer cannot be denied, however, does every member need to vote on every decision in the church?

Another biblical support is seen as the strongest evidence of a biblical church governing model. The practice of the early New Testament Church shows the evidence of Congregation-led church. In Act Chapter 6, the early church picked their first “deacons.” The qualifications were clear and expectations were known among all. In Matthew Chapter 18, I Corinthians Chapters 5 and 6, and II Corinthians Chapter 2, the entire church is given the responsibility of

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church discipline. Once again in Matthew Chapter 28, Mark Chapter 16 and I Corinthians Chapter 11, the ordinances, baptism and the Lord’s Supper were committed to the entire church. The book of Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, I and II Thessalonians are all written to the entire congregation, not just to church leaders. However, Paul addresses individuals in each of these letters. The last evidence of Congregation-led in the early church is found in Acts Chapters 11, 13 and 15. The early church chose its’ own representatives.

Strengths & Weaknesses

When a church becomes completely unified, God smiles and rejoices because He is being glorified above any tension in the church. It is a beautiful thing to see a church agreeing on any topic. There are so many things of this world relating to the church that has divided God’s people. A vote makes members have to choose a side, in turn, dividing a church

It is rare to leave a business meeting where joy and harmony was present in the church. There have always been post-business-meeting meetings where those who opposed a motion were airing their opinion. It may take place in the lobby of the church or parking lot or even in the car on the way home. Some people are nervous in a business meeting, choosing not to express their concern to the entire church, but will to their close friends. This “meeting” may take two forms. First they could be expressing their concern as a way to vent because of their disagreement. Many people vent about things they do not agree with, just ask anyone about his/her job, politics or sports and you will find something they do not like. It will not take long before he/she will express his/her dislikes to you. Expressing disagreement is not a bad thing, if it is carried out in a Christian manner.
The second type of post-business-meeting meeting is for the purpose of convincing
another he voted the wrong way. This type of conversation is extremely unhealthy. Let’s name
the person that is doing the convincing, Bill. Bill is talking to Jack about his decision to vote for
the motion (type of motion is irrelevant for this example). Bill claims Jack should have voted for
the motion because the motion will help the church save money. However, Jack thinks the
church needs to spend the money. Regardless of the motion, there is a division in the church that
will not be easy to overcome.

Churches have split over the color of the carpet, staff members, theology, money,
building projects, and the list goes on. Where does a congregation-led church draw the line on
how much detail it is going to allow its church to vote on? It is understandable that
congregation-led churches believe that the people have the power, but this can place a wedge
between members when you ask them to choose a side. Every decision that is made will have an
opposition.

Congregational governing demands strong discipleship ministries because they govern
themselves. Each year, congregational churches find leaders and teachers to help with their
discipleship ministries. They always look for people who are currently attending classes to rise
up and lead classes. Rightfully so, leaders should be students before they become teachers. The
problem lies with the idea of teachers training new teachers who then become leaders in the
church. Normally, the process is started over and repeated. Unless the teachers who are training
new teachers are continuously learning, the new teachers will know what the first teacher has
learned. For example, if teacher, “A,” teaches student, “B,” with the idea that he/she will
become a teacher one day in the local church, then, student, “B,” becomes teacher, “B,” and
begins to teach another student, student, “C,” who desires to be a teacher. There must be some
type of educational influence other than teacher, “A,” for teacher, “B,” to improve his/her teaching skills or knowledge, so student, “C,” can be a better student and teacher than teacher, “A”. If the education in a church is not going forward then the parties doing the governing will be weak.

With the organization of the congregation led churches requiring many people to fill positions, then the strength of the education becomes even more important. Most congregational churches have multiple committees, deacons, and paid staff that are all part of the decision making process. Any one of the people in these positions can be weak, and the church can suffer because of his/her lack of knowledge. Discipleship, training and education in the congregational church make the difference between a successful thriving ministry and one of confusion.

Some congregational churches are affiliated with the universal church by way of denominations, associations, coalitions and fellowships. Other congregational churches do not have any type of affiliation with an organization that would connect them to the universal church. This is a concern in which congregational churches distance themselves from the rest of the universal church.

These organizations provide more benefits than many people realize. They offer an avenue of wisdom through their representatives and staff. Some even provide leadership training, mission support and resources for pastorless churches.

Wedges between people do not sound like something God desires to happen in His Church. Wedges are like walls between two people. Two people cannot communicate if a wall is separating them. There will be a lack of understanding and communication among church members if walls are built between them. Walls begin with a wedge, a wedge that started with a vote.
When churches have walls between members, their troubles have been around for years. Wedges do not happen overnight and walls take years to build. Congregation-led churches must understand this weakness and strive to prevent wedges from happening. Anything that can divide, a wedge, can be used as an opportunity to build unity among believers. Paul writes in Ephesians 4:3 all churches should be “endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.” With the chance of division within the church, congregation-led government demands strong discipleship because they govern themselves. Use your own household as an example. You and your family cannot exceed your ability to manage your personal finances until you increase your knowledge of the subject. Like the church, people do not know how to handle the divisions until they are taught. Congregation-led churches will struggle with conflict, because of its decision to vote on the matter. The vote may leave them split over a motion and preparative work must be done to keep the body of Christ unified.

Since congregation-led churches train their own members, there must be some type of influence of discipleship from outside the local congregation. Many congregations look to a denomination or other ministry training tools within the universal church for assistance in training. Training is a good tool in which the local church can mature in its faith.

Variations of Congregational Government

Most congregation-led churches do not have anyone outside its membership demanding it to select a variation of congregation-led governing. Mark Dever states in his book, *The Church: The Gospel Made Visible*, “A congregational church recognizes the congregation as the final earthly court of appeal in matters of dispute. Members’ meetings are held where decisions are made by majority votes. Naturally, a higher degree of consensus is needed than in churches of
other polities.” The keyword is “final,” no one can determine all the variations congregational churches use to bring a motion to a members’ meeting. However, there are few common paths a dispute will travel through before reaching the members’ meeting.

Many smaller churches rely on their deacons to serve in many different capacities. There is a church in South Georgia that has five deacons. The chairman of the deacons also leads music in the worship service. He has always been heavily involved in multiple areas of the church. This gives him greater insight than a deacon in a larger church.

Many churches utilize a rotation model for selecting the terms of service for its deacons. Henry Webb explains,

In most cases after serving the specified term, the deacon is ineligible for reelection for one year. Those elected to fill a vacancy for one year or less usually are eligible for reelection of a full term. Churches usually choose a rotation approach for two reasons: (1) This approach provides continuity with only a portion of the deacons rotating off the active body each year, and (2) this approach makes it possible for more members to serve as deacons. Reserve deacons who have rotated off the active body can continue to minister as servants through other church responsibilities.

Webb has a great understanding of the deacon ministry as it ties into the operation of the church. There is nothing wrong with the process he has laid out. However, when churches do not have qualified men to serve in this capacity, some churches will lower their standards to allow men to serve. This is not the best solution because God expects these men to uphold a standard. Other churches have changed their policies rather than their standards. Policies should change over time as churches grow and mature. A one hundred member church does not operate the same as a five hundred member church. Policy changes will always work better than lowering standards.

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Deacons play a large part in how the local church operates. Deacons are often working outside their biblical job description. Congregation-led churches allow their deacons to have more power than they should have at times. Churches should evaluate their deacons’ ministry by the need, not by the demands of the church.

Deacons are known as the pre-church voting process or preliminary approval group. Pastors give the deacons more power than they need at times. Pastor, “A,” walks into a deacon meeting and asks the deacons, “Can we have a block party?” Pastor, “A,” just gave up his right as the one God has called to be the leader. Pastor, “A,” can let the deacons know that God has led him to have a block party and ask the deacons to help. Many times the deacons demand to give approval to allow the pastor and church to do ministry. This makes the influence of the deacons in a congregation-led church very important.

Some congregation-led churches rely on committees as the driving factor to move the church forward. This approach has pros and cons. In some cases, matters must go to multiple committees before a decision can be made. This takes time that churches do not have to waste when people are going to Hell and the church is falling farther behind in the Great Commission. However, to take a major decision to multiple committees is not necessarily a bad idea. One will know if a higher percentage of the church opposes or supports the motion when the church votes.

A newer approach to the congregation-led style of government has come from states allowing churches to become incorporated. A church that incorporates has a board, the number of required board members vary by state. The congregation elects members to serve on the board. The ideal setup would require a wide range of members to get a good sense of the heartbeat of the church. This incorporation board approves all decisions within the church by the authority granted it by the church.
The congregational board government would look like the following flow chart:

![Figure 1 Congregational Board Government](image)

The congregation will have the tendency to see themselves as leaders; the board is next, with the Pastor being the head employee of the staff, yet having no ability to lead or a misconception of leading from the rear. The Senior Pastor position in this model contradicts the biblical idea the Pastor being the under-shepherd and overseer.

In this congregation model, votes are held only for the budget, sale or purchase of property, Senior Pastor hiring/firing and building projects, with the board handling all other matters. The key to this variation is the communication from the board to the church.

Staff-led and congregation-led churches operate similar to an elder/pastoral led church. In the staff-led congregation, the staff is accountable to the congregational representatives, but lead the day-to-day operations of the church. The Senior Pastor leads the entire staff while shepherding the congregation. This can be the most stressful model for a staff, but the most liberating if the people trust the pastor.

These variations of congregation-led churches have variations within themselves and difficulty when comparing churches of like styles. The most common is the deacon-led church. The incorporation led congregation-led have the most difficulty when comparing two churches.
with the same concept. In each of these variations, the final say rests with the church body because it is congregationally led.

**Eldership**

In his book, *Systematic Theology*, Daniel L. Akin states, “In the New Testament, the words *elder, shepherd* or *pastor*, and *bishop* or *overseer* are used interchangeably in the context of the local church office.”\(^{13}\) Many see eldership as a controlling church governing of the local church. The New Testament is clear and overwhelmingly detailed about the functions, duties, and purpose of an eldership.

For the purpose of this thesis, there is a difference in the Presbyterian format and autonomous Eldership. The Baptist idea of eldership is different from the non-autonomous Presbyterian system. Wayne Gruden writes,

> The arguments in favor of this Presbyterian system are: (1) that those who have wisdom and gifts for eldership should be called on to use their wisdom to govern more than just one local church, and (2) a national (or even worldwide) government of the church shows the unity of the body of Christ. Moreover (3) such a system is able to prevent an individual congregation from falling into doctrinal error much more effectively than any voluntary association of churches."\(^{14}\)

Baptist theology would not accept this idea of an outside elder influence in a church. Baptists believe that every church should have a select people from its church to govern.

The first argument would be denied on the grounds of an elder serving multiple churches and being a part of one of those churches. Baptist theology would allow an elder to take a position with the SBC because,

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A New Testament church of the Lord Jesus Christ is an autonomous local congregation of baptized believers, associated by covenant in the faith and fellowship of the gospel; observing the two ordinances of Christ, governed by His laws, exercising the gifts, rights, and privileges invested in them by His Word, and seeking to extend the gospel to the ends of the earth. Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord. Its scriptural officers are pastors and deacons. While both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men as qualified by. The New Testament speaks also of the church as the Body of Christ which includes all of the redeemed of all the ages, believers from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation.\(^\text{15}\)

The position in the SBC is there to provide help, resources and wisdom. It was never intended for position within the SBC to control the local church.

Argument number two from Gruden for a “general assembly” sounds great in practical matters. However, church government does not bring unity in the body of Christ. It brings about a common denominator or consistence among all the churches and limits the amount a church can be independently operated within itself. Paul tells us that unity comes by being selfless.

Therefore if \textit{there is} any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, \textit{being} of one accord, of one mind. \textit{Let nothing be done} through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.\(^\text{16}\)

Argument number three is practical for keeping churches thinking and believing correctly in matters of theology. There is one problem that is noted; when the whole association or denomination falls into bad theology, the members of the local church cannot do anything about it. When the authority is taken from the people, they cannot do what is right or wrong, they can


\(^{16}\) Philippians 2:1-4 (NKJV).
only do what their leaders tell them to do. In the autonomous Baptist, church, the people have the right to change its leadership if they are led down the path of bad theology.

For the purpose of the research in this project, the eldership will be defined as a group of men that meet the biblical qualifications to serve as overseers of one local church. The idea of autonomous eldership will be understood as biblical eldership or just “eldership” throughout this paper. When looking at history, qualifications and purpose of elders, autonomous biblical eldership would appear to be God’s will for the local church.

**Biblical Support**

An eldership model is heavily supported and executed throughout the New Testament. From the first century until today, the eldership model has taken on many variations. Changes have come to biblical interpretation. Some churches are fleeing from the biblical model of eldership, when others are redefining their position of eldership. Christians have selected their position on the qualifications and responsibility of the elders.

One of the most common debates about eldership is singular or plural elders. Singular means only having a Head Elder or Senior Pastor, acting as the CEO. Plural elders mean a team of men that possess a lead-elder, normally the Senior Pastor. “There are at least seven titles for the man of God who leads the New Testament church: (1) elder, (2) bishop, (3) pastor, (4) preacher, (5) teacher, (6) servant, and (7) messengers.” The term “elder” can be interchangeable with the six other terms Towns lists. Elder does not refer to the age of a man, but a position of spiritual maturity.

In Revelation Chapters 2 and 3, the angel is seen to be a pastor or elder of the seven churches in Asia. The term “angel” is singular in referring to all seven churches. The church of Ephesus is the first example; “To the angel of the church of Ephesus write, ‘These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:’” The last church of the seven is Laodicea, “And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,

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'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God.\textsuperscript{19}

If one only uses these verses as his evidence, the opinion could be that Eldership is a single person style of church government. A complete understanding of church government must take the entire text into account.

Looking at the entire text, 1 Timothy 5:17-20 should be noted,

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain”, and, “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear.\textsuperscript{20}

Philippians 1:1-2, point to a plural eldership, Paul and Timothy, bond servants of Jesus Christ, “To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{21}

The most profound reference to a plural eldership is Titus 1:5, “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint elders in every city as I commanded you”\textsuperscript{22} Paul told Titus his plan of appointing elders, plural, to oversee the work of the ministry in their cities. This amazing approach to establish leaders in ministry was the attempt to grow churches. Each church needs leaders to lead ministries to local communities. The team approach to a ministry, business, or corporation will succeed beyond a Lone Ranger ideal. Briner and Pritchard share, “Early in this book I mentioned my partner, Donald Dell. In the early days of our relationship, we learned that we were usually stronger and

\textsuperscript{19} Revelation 3:14 (NKJV).

\textsuperscript{20} 1 Timothy 5:17-20 (NKJV).

\textsuperscript{21} Philippians 1:1-2 (NKJV).

\textsuperscript{22} Titus 1:5 (NKJV).
more effective as a team than as individuals.” Plural eldership gives the idea of a team working together with a leader of the team moving them forward. The qualifications of elders and deacons are closely similar because of the leadership position in the local church. The qualifications that have had the most attention include marriage, drinking and disagreements/quarrels. These three have been argued for years, creating church splits and disunity among believers.

Before addressing the big three, there needs to be an understanding of the purpose of every believer. Every believer should seek to bring glory to God as shown in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” If every believer can agree on this presupposition then the big three should be understood clearly. Another presupposition is found in the Great Commission. If believer’s desire to reach the lost, they must be an example that exemplifies Jesus in their life.

Now, the big three begins with marriage. Marriage is a commitment for a lifetime, between a man and a woman. The idea of divorce is found in Scripture, but was not God’s intent from the beginning. The phrase used in 1 Timothy is “the husband of one wife.” Many Christians take this to mean one of three things: (1) the man can only be married to one woman in his life, (2) the man may be divorced, but cannot remarry, and (3) the man cannot be married to multiple women at the same time. All three are possibilities if used incorrectly. However, believers must ask themselves “which of the three contains grace, glorifies God and proves to be a good witness to the lost?

The culture in the first century was known for ungodly relationships. Look at John 4, the

24 1 Corinthians 10:31 (NKJV).
25 1 Timothy 3:12 (NKJV).
woman at the well had multiple husbands and was living with a man that was not her husband. The confidence of holding to the third option is overwhelming because of their culture. All of the qualifications could be tracked back to the culture and Paul writing about them. Today’s culture is similar with the casual relationships, living together before marriage and the troubling divorce rate. There is grace in divorce, grace in those who choose not to remarry, and a bad witness for Jesus with those who marry multiple people at the same time.

The second of the big three is drinking alcohol. This is a testimony issue. No one can determine when too much is too much. Where is the line for too much? Some people agree with social drinking, but every social drinker is witnessing to someone around them. They are drinking to appear acceptable to the outside world. The Bible is clear that drunkenness is taking advantage of grace. When the line is unclear and believer’s testimonies are in jeopardy, then it is best to be alcohol free.

The third of the big three should be the most important qualification for elders. An argumentative attitude can be devastating to a believer’s testimony. Arguing can lead people to infer that a believer only wants his or her way. Argumentative people should not be in church leadership. This will disqualify more men from being an elder than anything else. Elders should not argue or start an argument because they should emulate Jesus’ example of grace.

The last topic relating to elders that may need more explanation to understand is their responsibility within the church. There are three common terms related to the responsibilities of elders: rule, shepherd and oversee. Each of these terms describes the responsibility of the elders, and once fulfilled, these duties provide strength and direction to the church.

The first duty, found in 1 Timothy 5:17, requires elders to “rule well.” The term “rule” does not appeal to many people because it has the connotation of lording over someone. Baptist
churches prefer not to use this term because of their free-church mindset. However, the way people see their countries governing, they see church governing in a similar manner. Many Americans do not like the idea of someone dictating their lives. The elders’ responsibility is not to dictate, but to govern. Think about ruling in the context of governing to undertake resolutions. Elders are to rule as peacemakers, not to rule as dictators.

The second duty is to shepherd the people. A shepherd does a lot for his sheep. He feeds them. An elder is to feed members with spiritual food that brings about nourishment and growth. A shepherd pastors his sheep. The elder should guide people to a deeper level of faith and protect them from the Devil. The elder should tend to the flock by visiting the sick and shut-ins, counseling and loving the people from the pulpit.

The third duty of the elders is to oversee the local church. Overseers in the church make sure that everything and everyone in church is working well. Committees may neglect their duties or a deacon quit serving, and the elders are to encourage them. When bills need to be paid, the toilet is broken and an argument takes place in the children’s department, elders are to make sure all of these matters are taken care of.

Elders have a big job to fulfill according to Scripture. Many churches try to give their elders a job description, but the biblical requirements trump man’s requirements. If elders are fulfilling the scriptural requirements, they should not fulfill man-made requirements. Let the elders serve one master, God’s requirements.

Strengths & Weaknesses

Both Congregational and Elder-led churches have their strengths and weaknesses. All government systems will have good and bad things about them. All governing systems have the
opportunity to create problems in the local church. People run governments in the church and the Devil loves to use people to mess things up. The strengths of eldership governing outweigh the weaknesses. The main strength of (the) eldership is the clear biblical foundation. It cannot be denied that eldership is clearly defined in the New Testament. The example of elders meeting is displayed in the book of Acts. Letters, like Philippians, were written to encourage the elders. The requirements are clear in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. The expectations can be found in 1 Timothy 5 and 1 Peter 5. In Titus, the reader will find the goal to have elders appointed in every local church.

Although strength of eldership governing comes by leadership, elders are the key to success in this system. What is important is where elders spend their time. Eldership demands continuous training of new elders to build a successful ministry. A demand for strong leadership, and given the opportunity to have a core group of leaders, has a positive implication for a church. The core group can grow, learn, and mature together and have a close relationship that congregational leaders may not have.

Weaknesses of eldership can be seen in the bad apple idea - one bad head elder and the church can suffer greatly. Eldership does have a chance of being controlled by bad theology, forced vision and poor leadership. The key is to find elders that believe and live biblically, have great leadership skills, and have a vision for the local church.

Another weakness is found within the attitude of the congregation. If the people demand to have a say, they will experience frustration in an eldership government style. In congregation-led churches, the people have the freedom to vote on everything. The elder-led idea is limited to the task of getting everyone’s opinion and moves the church forward more effectively. Churches over 300 people will lose time by voting on every idea or decision. Elder-led churches will trust
their leaders to make most decisions. The downfall of trusting the leaders is an understanding that they may not vote the way a person or group in the church would like them to. Eldership takes the direct decision making process out of the hands of members of the church and demands a level of trust for them.

Another weakness in the eldership model is the perception of the elders. When people feel like they are being ruled over, they will shut down. The elders in the local church must understand this perception and try to be leaders who listen, communicate and shepherd the people. If the elders use their power or authority as a vehicle to get their way, people will perceive them as dictators, not men of God.

Variations

The variations of an elder-led church are endless. The Presbyterian model may be the most common and well-known model. However, most other elder-led churches vary on their practical way of handling decisions. The best way to illustrate the decision making process is through flow charts.

Remember, these flow charts are for practical purposes. Some congregational-led churches have adopted elders in their decision making process, making true elder-led nearly impossible to find outside of the Presbyterian Church. Remember, an elder is interchangeable with bishop and pastor. Many churches, including the Presbyterian Church, have elders that are paid staff and non-paid elders. Elders could mean bishops, pastors, or elders that are paid or volunteers. All elders should meet the biblical standard and expectations for an elder.

In Table 2, Congregational Plural Eldership is illustrated with the congregation at the top of the chart. Ideas are presented to the congregation in a meeting, and then the elders or board
can execute the decision. This chart is for Congregational Plural Eldership with Incorporation Board.

![Flow Chart of Congregational Plural Eldership with Incorporation Board]

**Figure 2 Flow Chart of Congregational Plural Eldership with Incorporation Board**

Figure 2 is similar to Figure 1, without an Incorporation Board. This does not mean that they are not incorporated. They could be incorporated, with the Elders fulfilling the duties and responsibilities of the board in Table 1. Notice, the congregation is still at the top. The congregation must make all decisions. These two methods take the leadership out of the hands of the pastor.

The idea of a pastor not being able to make a decision without the church’s vote is overkill. Think about it, there were twenty responses in the latest Lifeway Compensation Study from churches with attendance of 200-299, with the average pay package for their senior pastor being $89,905. Churches are paying pastors good salaries to wait for them to make decisions. In this flow chart, that is what is happening.

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Below in Table 2.5, the elders are placed at the top of the flow chart. This model sees the elders and senior pastor as leaders of the church, the deacons as servants and the committees/ministry teams as partners in ministry. The congregation does not have the authority to dictate the way God is leading the senior pastor.

In Table 2.6, the flow chart illustrates an Elder-led that is similar to the Presbyterian style. The elders are at the top, then the staff, boards, or ministry teams. Notice, the congregation is there to be ministered to. They have no power; they are seen as the sheep under the leadership of the shepherd. In Table 2.5 the congregation selects and elects their leaders. In Table 2.6, the congregation controls nothing.
The differences in these four decision-making flow charts are notable. There are positive and negative things about each model. Elder-led is a broad term that can be put into practice many ways.

In this chapter, Congregation-led and Elder-Led churches have been explored. Their pros and cons have been explained with special attention to the biblical traits that each model possesses. There are surprising elements, which are found in the variations of both church government styles. These variations have and will affect the way a church operates. The way the church operates will affect the church’s productivity for the gospel in reaching people with the gospel. Churches cannot expect to fulfill the Great Commission when the operating procedures and methods hinder their efforts in reaching and training people.
CHAPTER THREE

CHURCH GOVERNMENT IN RELATION TO CHURCH GROWTH

Churches all over the world are declining in numbers. Church leaders are dying, and property and resources are being sold and church buildings are being used as museums. This can be depressing to think about. However, churches do not have to be in decline. They can turn their situations around and find life, energy and excitement. It will take time and many of the challenges must be approached in a different way.

Church government is one of those areas that need something different. Churches are losing many of their pastors to the frustration of stagnation. Pastors are called into ministry to grow, lead, shepherd and care for a healthy congregation. A congregation cannot be healthy if it is declining in numbers and has no spiritual growth taking place.

Churches should grow numerically and spiritually in order to be healthy. God desires the church to add people to the Sunday morning service and grow the ones there to a deeper relationship with Jesus. Numerical and spiritual growth will not happen if there is conflict, or roadblocks are placed in the way of church members. People need discipleship classes and methods to exercise their spiritual health. If church government gets in the way of discipleship and evangelism, a church has no chance of growing. In this chapter, the severity of the problem will be exposed. There will be three sections that look at the effectiveness of church government on church growth. Leadership, by-laws and time management will play a large role in this matter.

Leadership, Governing and Growth

When a pastor begins pastoring a church, there is a period of time where the church and pastor are trying to figure each other out. The pastor is learning who does
what and what motivates the people. The church is wondering if the new pastor is going
to preach, pastor and shepherd like the last pastor. This period could take as long as a
year, or take even longer. Sometimes this period does not end before the pastor resigns.
How long a pastor or church leader remains in his current ministry determines a lot. The
longer he is at a church, the more time people have with him. The longer a pastor is
present in a community, the more people outside of the church will know him. Longevity
matters a lot. The following chart shows current longevity:

Table 6 How long have you been in your current place of ministry?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-3 years</td>
<td>27.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 years</td>
<td>20.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-15 years</td>
<td>30.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-25 years</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 or more years</td>
<td>11.63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly half, forty-eighteen point eighty-four percent of church leaders who took
the survey have been in their current ministry less than six years. Twenty-seven percent
have just recently learned the names of the people in their ministry. Their leadership is
limited by the short length of time they have been in their current position.

The next major number in the survey that applies to longevity would be that of
decreasing, or near negative, numbers. Churches cannot always expect a new pastor to
increase growth with the same church thinking and doing the same thing.

Table 7 Growth in the last five years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Growth Level</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>25.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By less than 5%</td>
<td>16.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By more than 5%</td>
<td>16.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By more than 10%</td>
<td>18.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By more than 20%</td>
<td>23.20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Churches change slowly and pastors, at the start of their tenure, have to move the church forward slowly. Forty-one point eighty-six percent of churches responded to growing less than five percent or declining in the last five years. That means, in a church of 100 people, they have reached less than five people in five years. The pastor, leaders, and church body may be moving too slow. Notice this is not a salvation or baptism number, this is church ministry growth. Almost half of churches have not added more than one person in the last five years by any means, methods, promotions, gimmicks or community events. There is a problem within the local churches.

The leadership correlates to the decline in churches. Twenty-seven percent of pastors or church leaders have only been in their position for or three years or less. Leadership in a church must be consistent. Churches cannot change pastors and believe they do not need to change. High turnover is bad for any organization. In “Breakout Churches,” Thom Rainer writes, “The average tenure of a breakout church leader exceeds twenty-one years, while the other pastors in our study have been at their churches only about four years.”\(^1\) The Breakout Churches all have leaders that are consistent in their positions. Communities cannot be reached when churches have different pastors every four years.

Leaders have passion and desire that set them apart from others. They should have a desire to teach the community they are serving. The question was asked about the leader’s mission outreach events each year. The responses are shown in Table 3.3.

\(^1\) Thom S. Rainer, *Breakout Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 57.
Table 8 Mission Outreach Events (Yearly)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5</td>
<td>20.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 5</td>
<td>32.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 10</td>
<td>25.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 15</td>
<td>20.93%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The outreach event could have been anything. Some churches do door-to-door visitation, block parties, Thanksgiving or Christmas baskets, Fall Festival, men’s steak night, neighborhood blitz, Vacation Bible School, Back Yard Bible Club, and the list goes on and on. There is a wide range of things a church could do that would be considered an outreach event.

It is sad that fifty-three percent of churches do less than ten outreach events per year. Churches could blame their location, weather, community dynamics or finances on their low numbers. The blame game will not be justified when people are in Hell. The responsibility is in the hands of the believers and the church.

Forty-six percent of church leaders said their church has more than ten outreaches each year. Notice that in Table 3.2, forty-one percent of churches claimed to have grown by ten percent or more in the last five years. To take the research a step further, in Table 3.1, fifty-one percent of pastors have served in their church more than seven years. It would be possible, although not guaranteed, that churches with pastors with long tenures, with a strong presence in the community, should grow on an average of ten to twenty percent every five years.

People doubt these numbers in different ways. Conflict may arise and churches leave the mission to deal with problems. Others may have doubt about these numbers because of the size of their church and budget. However, it is easier to double a church
running a hundred people than one running a thousand. Smaller churches normally have less to work with, but have less people to reach to have a larger percentage. Some people may doubt these numbers because subconsciously they are fearful to reach out. These doubts turn into complaints, and the church members reach no one because of bureaucracy in the policies and busyness of the church.

In the following table, Table 3.4, this idea was asked to those who took the survey. The question of the difficulty “to carry out the Great Commission to the best of your ability” was answered with a simple, “yes” or “no”.

Table 9 Do you find it difficult to carry out the Great Commission to the best of your ability in your current ministry because of the church governing process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answers Selected</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>27.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>72.09%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Almost twenty-eight percent of all pastors and church elders feel the difficulty in carrying out the Great Commission because of the governing process. A man is called by God to be a pastor or church leader. God has commanded the church to reach and disciple the lost to become followers of Jesus. Why are churches making it difficult for pastors and leaders to do what they are called to do? Churches should not make it difficult for pastors and leaders to do what God has called them to do.

Another “yes” or “no” question was asked to determine if by-laws or operational manuals in the church help people to fulfill the mission of the church. The mission of the church should be compelled, supported and pushed by every aspect of the church, including the way it operates. See Table 10 to discover the results.
Table 10 Do you think the by-laws or operation manual compel you to carry out the Great Commission?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>41.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>58.14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first Wal-Mart store was opened in 1962 in Bentonville, Arkansas with this mission statement: “We save people money so they can live better.”

Wal-Mart has the same mission statement today, fifty-two years later. Their famous “Rollback” the price signs are a reminder to their employees and customers of the mission that Mr. Walton gave them. Churches need to take note of Mr. Walton’s leadership by keeping the mission in front of the people and compelling them to carry out the mission.

The forty-two percent that state that their by-laws compel them to carry out the Great Commission should be an example to others. The other fifty-eight percent should be seeking a way to write by-laws and operating manuals that compel their churches to reach out and train people to follow Jesus.

Before the leaders can feel they are being compelled by the church’s by-laws to fulfill the Great Commission, the by-laws must focus on the church’s mission. The following table shows the focus of the by-laws. The by-laws, or any written document in an organization, must focus on the mission to provide continuity in the mission and operation. If a group of people sit down to write the by-laws of a church, but don’t focus on the mission mandated for the church, they are not a biblically established church. Churches cannot get around the fact that God made the church His headquarters on earth to reach people with His love and grace. The by-laws are not exempt from the Great Commission.

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Forty-five percent of church leaders say their church’s by-laws do not focus on the Great Commission. That may be why twenty-five percent of churches are declining. If the church makes decisions in meetings based on any other reason than the Great Commission, then the church has lost focus of what God has called it to do. Churches need to understand their focus determines their maximum effort. When their focus is not on reaching people, their church will die.

**Table 11 Do you think your church’s by-laws focus on the Great Commission?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>54.76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Leader’s Confidence in Their Church’s Governing**

The key to the success of the church is confidence in the governing process and people in the process. The success in their governing process depends on the people in leadership roles. If people don’t believe in their leaders, they will naturally reject them. Leaders must build trust by being honest and transparent and with consistent communication. Leaders should seek to build trust within their church, regardless of governing style.

People desire honesty in their leaders. No one cares to listen to someone lying or seeking attention for dishonest gains. People are looking for leaders that have integrity in all matters of their life. Leaders risk relationships and position when they are not honest.

Transparency has become a major problem for leaders in today’s church. John Kupers explains transparent leadership this way,

There are three aspects to transparent leadership – strategy, structure and interpersonal. Strategy is often viewed as rarefied air, reserved for top management who are able to grasp the nuances and complexities of long-term strategy … Structure includes roles, responsibilities, talent management and core processes … Interpersonal transparency is the most challenging. We all have
something to hide, something to prove and something to lose. Transparency demands a personal willingness to allow you to be vulnerable.\(^3\)

Transparency has become an issue because pastors are afraid to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is scary and the unknown scares most people. If a leader desires to lead to his fullest, he must become aware and accept the risk of being vulnerable.

Consistent communication builds transparency in relationships and reminds the followers the direction the leader is going. This is the most important thing about leadership. All leaders must have followers, or they are just going through life alone. Leaders that communicate clearly and consistently build a level of trust and transparency. The following table illustrates the level of trust in a church survival.

**Table 12 Lack of trust for leadership in your church**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>25.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>74.42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The relationship between the pastor and congregation has always had its good days and bad days. When the people trust their leader, they follow with more devotion and focus. When trust is low, the people will question the direction and decisions of the leader. Seventy-four percent of those surveyed believe that their followers trust them. This is three out of four church leaders (pastor, elder, staff members). The number is accurate considering the percentage of other questions in the survey. Twenty-five percent of churches are declining; see Table 3.2. There is a direct correlation between growth in a church and trusting the leader. The leaders that feel their churches do not trust them is the same percentage as churches declining in the last five years - twenty-five percent.

Growing and Wasting Time

Each day people waste time when they should be using their time wisely. Wasting time can be anything in life that does not provide spiritual, physical, or mental growth. God has called believers to live a life of productivity. God has given us time on this earth to bring glory to Him. An unproductive life will waste time and resources that will not fulfill the desires of God’s heart. Too much time is wasted on things that will not last for eternity.

Just like one’s personal life, churches waste time on things that will not last for eternity. You have never heard a sermon on wasting time by witnessing. There has never been a conference that spent two days on wasting time by fulfilling the Great Commission. Churches struggle with trying to do some things in a manner that does not upset people; verses doing what God has called them to do.

There was a staff member of a Southern Baptist church who learned this weakness of the church. Being hired three months prior; he went to the deacons with a burden on his heart to start an outreach/visitation program. He shared his heart with those men that the church elected to serve. After sharing his heart, silence filled the room. The deacons did not know what to say. Then, one by one, they asked questions about the plan to do outreach every Tuesday night in their community. Finally, the staff member asked, “Who will help reach this community one Tuesday a month?” Each deacon had some type of excuse why they could not participate in the outreach. The deacon’s attitude aside, the staff member wasted his time researching, praying, and asking them for their help - God had called the staff member to reach out. This staff member is not the only leader in a church that has faced this situation. See the following figures:
Getting permission to start a ministry should not be complicated. Those that have to ask the church, deacons, or all of the above will have a difficult time building ministries because their ministries are at the risk of becoming popularity events or programs. Leaders cannot lead if permission is required to do what God has asked them to do. Normally when this is discussed, those who object are in favor of what is going on in “their” church. However, seeking/imparting information is different than decision-making. Churches need to be informed about decisions, not the decision maker. Notice in Acts 6:2, “Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said …” The twelve did not ask, they “said” or told what needed to take place for the complaints to be handled. Paul did not ask permission to start a church. David did not ask his followers in which direction he should lead. John did not seek advice on writing the Revelation when God laid it on his heart in a vision.

God lays special missions on people’s hearts. Many times a church’s operational methods can discourage them from following Him. If the by-laws of a church are focused on the Great Commission, then people will not get discouraged when trying to do missions. The following chart shows the focus of the by-laws in the churches surveyed.
Figure 7 Do you think your church’s by-laws focus on the Great Commission?

If the way a church operates does not focus on the mission, then the mission is handicapped. Forty-five percent of church leaders feel their church’s by-laws focus on the Great Commission. This leaves over fifty percent to believe their by-laws do not focus on the Great Commission. The churches surveyed are autonomous Baptist churches that write their own by-laws. They mostly state their beliefs or the purpose of the church at the beginning of their by-laws, generally making a statement, then quoting Matthew 28:19-20. After that, the mission is not discussed. Every committee, ministry team and staff position should be focused on the mission of the church.

If the by-laws do not focus on the Great Commission, then the leaders must make the mission the center of the church to overshadow the operation of the church. In table 3.10, the leaders of the churches surveyed show where they spend most of their time, ministry or administration.

Table 13 What does your church spend more time doing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evangelism, outreach, visiting</td>
<td>69.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business meetings, deacons meetings,</td>
<td>30.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>committee meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sixty-nine percent say they spend more time on evangelism, outreach and visiting than business meetings, deacons meetings, and committee meetings. Three out of ten churches are wasting time focusing too much time on meetings. Meetings are needed at times; however, they
cannot replace or overshadow the Great Commission. There is nothing that can be substituted in life for obeying His desire to reach the world for Jesus Christ.

Wasting time on *doing church* rather than *being church* can be contributed to the understanding of Matthew 28:19. The Great Commission states, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen.” One of the key words is “go.” The definition of “go” and its interpretation will determine how church leaders will lead their church within the Great Commission. The following chart shows the responses to the definition of “go.”

**Table 14 What is the best definition of the word “Go” in Matthew 28:19? Select only one.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choices</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The church should have services</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that reach people.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The church should have ministries that are</td>
<td>86.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mission minded.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The church should have mission trips.</td>
<td>4.65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eight-six percent of church leaders claim the word “go” means the church should have ministries that are mission minded. The leaders have a good idea of God’s desire to have everything and every ministry focused on the Great Commission. They also understand the purpose of “go” in relationship to the church. The word has the idea of moving to gain ground in a lost world. Out of the three options, mission minded ministries give the idea that everyone is participating in the Great Commission and no one is wasting time.

When time and growth are combined into the same context, the electric bill comes to mind. The electric company does not make money unless energy is being used. When a light is
on and no one is in the room, the company is making money and the homeowner is wasting money. The company is growing by the loss of the homeowner. This is similar to the relationship between the Church and the Devil.

The Church is to be all about reaching people for Jesus Christ. The Devil wants to stop that from happening. The Church is like the electric bill and the light. When a Church leaves the lights on, it keeps the church distracted by the Devil, his company of demons gains spiritual ground promoting darkness. Churches must control the amount of time they are distracted so they are keeping a low electric bill, or in other words, so the Church is focused on the Great Commission.

The following chart is a comparison between two previous charts. Questions two and fifteen are related to the growth and time spent.

**Table 15 Ministry growth and more time spent**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions two and fifteen</th>
<th>Two Responses</th>
<th>Fifteen Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Declined</td>
<td>25.58%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By less than 5%</td>
<td>10.28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By more than 5%</td>
<td>16.28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By more than 10%</td>
<td>18.60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By more than 20%</td>
<td>23.26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evangelism, outreach, visiting</td>
<td>69.71%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business meeting, deacons meetings, committee meetings</td>
<td>30.23%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notice how close the percentages are between declining churches and churches that spend more time at business, deacons, and committee meetings. They are within five percent of each other. There is a direct relationship between the two, because meeting churches are not focused on being reaching churches.

Chapter three has provided a clear analysis of the surveys taken of pastors and church leaders through a website, Survey Monkey. The three major principles in this chapter include
churches governing with leaders through growth within their church; leader’s confidence in their church’s governing, and churches that waste time and decline. These topics of research have provided great insight in the decision making process of the local church. When churches agree to a governing style that makes decisions effectively then more time, energy and resources are spent on the Great Commission. That is the main idea, to maximize the Great Commission by transforming the church’s government.
CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT IS WORKING TO FULFILL THE GREAT COMMISSION

The local church is at a crossroads of events and culture shift. Rates of decline of church attendance and baptisms are at an all-time high. There is something transpiring within the world that cannot be explained in human terms. The evidence is all around us, but seems to be beyond the human comprehension, and the change is surprisingly overwhelming.

What is working today to reach people will change tomorrow. Technology and methods are changing every month and the changes do not seem to be slowing down. Take Sunday school as an example; new church plants do not start with the traditional Sunday school model, they have small groups or cell groups. Many people in churches have been upset with the changes from Sunday school to small groups. In one church, there was a man who left when they discontinued Sunday school. That is unfortunate. The world is changing and the church is changing.

This is not a change of theology or the message of Jesus; it is a change in the methods used to reach people. What reached people forty years ago are not working now. Forty years ago it was culturally expected that people attend church. Today, people use Sunday as their means of self-fulfillment.

The church cannot expect people to just show-up; they must be reached with different methods. The methods of reaching have changed and they will continue to change. Churches unwilling to change will be left behind to die. The principles in chapter four will not change; however, the methods attached to the principles will change over time.

In the book, 11 Innovations in the Local Church, it is stated, "Most churches need to change because they're showing little or no statistical growth (numerical, spiritual or otherwise),
and minimal impact on the surrounding culture. Too many are struggling just to keep their doors open, and yet they tend to keep replaying what they did 'last year.'"¹ It is not the time in church culture to hold fast to traditions and legalism, but to be innovative in ways of doing ministry for the sake of the Gospel. People have changed, and the way to reach them has changed, but the Gospel is the same.

People have given many reasons for why the church will not change, but the church must change. The reasons have been anything from money, tradition and/or complacency. None of these are legitimate reasons for churches to resist innovative ideas. Innovation in a church is changing the method without changing the message. Most church is in desperate times where the methods need to be changed for the sake of the message.

Many may argue with the phrase, "for the sake of the message." That is what the gospel is all about. It is about getting the message of what Jesus did for a lost world. God gives believers the ways in scripture to relate the message of hope to people. God has intended for Christians to be smart enough to use technology and other modern tools to be able to reach people. This is not done for any other reason than for the sake of the message. It is God’s desire to see that everyone has the opportunity to hear the message of hope through Jesus Christ. The church of today must be innovative and compelled to do whatever it takes to reach people for Jesus.

**By-Laws and the Great Commission**

Most people do not think about the operation of the church and the Great Commission in the same context. There are pastors that will focus on running a church and others on growing a church. These two types of pastors need to be reminded that their duties include both. Pastors

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and lay leaders cannot favor one over the other. Either a church will reach a lot of people and assimilate them into ministries, or they will struggle to reach people. The church that reaches and assimilates can change their community, city, state, country and the world. Something to help a church balance the struggle between operating a church, and reaching out to the community, is hiring two different pastors to accomplish these tasks. Some churches have a senior associate pastor who will help the senior pastor with more of the administrative duties of running the day-to-day operation of the church. This will allow the senior pastor to have more time to focus on reaching people. Not all churches are able to afford two pastors. However, it is nice to have this option to create the balance needed between administration and ministry.

Do not misunderstand the purpose of this project; to provide a biblical guide to maximize the Great Commission by transforming your church government. This is not an attempt to redefine biblical principles, but to rethink the process of being biblical. Many times in the church, things are done the way they are because members do not desire to change or they are afraid to change.

By-laws are just that, traditional procedures that rarely change. If by-laws do change frequently in a church, one should find another church; mainly because the by-laws are seen as the document that holds the body of believers accountable to each other in matters pertaining to church operations. The church that cannot make change or makes changes too often, will lead to devastation by way of distrust for leadership.

The way churches think about their by-laws needs to change. One church may be asked, “Why do you have a table committee?” There are answers that can explain this. They might say the church has a table committee to set up and take down tables as needed, or they have a table committee to help with set up for ministries that will reach out to people with the Gospel. Notice
the difference. The first option states their duty or chore. The second states the purpose of the table committee related to the mission of the church. When committees understand their part in the overreaching mission statement, they will be more motivated to put up and take down tables.

Over the years, churches have been famous for creating a committee for every need in the church; needs that may be too small to require a committee, but they form one anyway. There are churches with too many committees, and the more committees, the more pressure to fulfill positions. The more committees a church has the more time that is spent finding people to serve on these committees. The more time a church spends on filling committees, that is less time they are spending on the Great Commission. The Great Commission should take priority over filling committees. When churches are focused on fulfilling volunteer positions, they lose the primary objective of the church, reaching the lost.

The word “committees” has been slowly changing over the last few years. Many churches are moving away from committees as decision makers and more as teams of service. The following table explains this change in numbers.

**Table 16 What does your church call the groups that help carry out the ministry?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministry Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Committees</td>
<td>13.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry Teams</td>
<td>62.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry Counsels</td>
<td>2.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both A and C</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both B and C</td>
<td>2.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None, Other</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sixty-two percent of church leaders identify the groups that carry out the ministry as “ministry teams.” This changes the connotation of those carrying out the ministry. Ministry teams draws attention to the aspect of working together for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission. Committees take votes and work together until everyone agrees. Committees
determine God’s will by voting. Ministry teams determine God’s will by seeking God as a group. The “team” carries the idea of unity while “committees” implies that someone is getting his or her way.

Committees are seen as more of a decision-making group in the context of the idea of a group of people voting on a particular matter. This idea of decision-making begins with all the evidence given to the committee members then the best direction is considered. The committee then makes the decision by voting which sometimes leads members of the committee to feel pressured to join the majority. When the committee members leave the meeting, some members regret not voting the way they desired, but voting the way others voted. This does not always produce the best outcome because those who feel pressure to vote as the others did will eventually let that be known to other church members. This guilt trip way of making decisions in a church leads to an unhealthy environment where people are hesitant to be honest and transparent. In a healthy committee run church, the members understand the committees can only make recommendations, not decisions.

Ministry teams, as seen in the research, have become very popular among churches. This rise in popularity over the last two decades has been in a large part due to of Thom Rainer’s research that was discussed in Chapter 1. Churches that are in a decline look for a group of people to make a decision. Churches that are growing look for people to get involved in ministry teams or some type of involvement structure. Ministry teams focus more on involvement with the work of the kingdom than making the decision in the local church.

All churches will claim they are working to fulfill the Great Commission; however, not all are practicing what they preach. It is hard to believe that they are reaching out when baptisms are declining. When less people are going to church, the mission is being hindered at some
point. To measure the amount of a church’s productivity in fulfilling the Great Commission, one should look no further than the example its staff is setting.

The staff that does missions work sets the example for the congregation. The question is, is the staff member allowed time off to participate in missions work? In the following table the percentage of churches allowing staff to have paid time for mission trips is overwhelming.

Table 17 Does your church allow their pastor paid time off for mission trips?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paid Time Off for Mission Trips</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>88.37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>11.63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Eleven percent of churches do not allow their pastor paid time off for mission trips. This is one out of ten churches that do not want their pastor setting the example. This group of churches will struggle with mission work because their pastor may not be participating. Leaders must lead the charge and set the example to show the importance of the Great Commission.

The concept of not allowing your leaders to participate in the Great Commission by going on mission trips is surprising. Everything that is written on the leadership perspective in the Christian worldview indicates that the leader must set the example. Jesus makes it clear with his life, that leaders are expected to be an example for the people to follow. When churches hinder their pastor from being that example, the entire congregation suffers from the lack of displaying correct leadership.

Gary L. McIntosh states, “A church that wants to grow must staff positions on the left side of the continuum. Staff members who help find new people (evangelism), keep new people (assimilation), and worship (celebration) focus on the priorities that result in continued growth.”

The staff sets the example and tone for the rest of the church. Churches will evolve into the

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personality of its pastor. Over time, the people will form the same passions as the Senior Pastor. If the pastor focuses more on discipleship, the congregation will do less evangelism. The key is for the pastor to keep a balance between discipleship and evangelism to fulfill the whole mission.

**Common Denominators in Growing Churches**

There have been entire books written on the common denominators in growing churches. Churches that are growing have these common elements that affect their ability to reach their community for Jesus Christ. These elements may differ from location of the church, denomination, or style of ministry. The key is to identity the common denominators that do not restrict these elements of growth.

General terms and ideas will be focused on to determine the common denominators among growing churches. Becoming a common denominator cannot be so detailed that more than just growing churches possess them. There are common denominators among all churches but not all churches are growing. It's best to only look at the denominators that affect the growth of the church in this research.

The first common denominator is the way in which the church members perceive the Great Commission. If great emphasis is put on reaching people, then the people find the Great Commission is important to them. There are some churches that do not place a large emphasis on the Great Commission or reaching out to people. Examine the following table to see the research results.

**Table 18 How do you think your church would rank the Great Commission?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat important</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>30.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely important</td>
<td>61.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thirty-eight percent of all churches surveyed see the Great Commission as somewhat important or important. The other option extremely important yields the results of sixty-one percent. It is heartbreaking to see that over a third of all the churches do not see the Great Commission as extremely important. If there is not a great emphasis on the Great Commission then there will be a great lack of outreach. Wherever the force of the church lies, there will be the heart of the church. Great Commission churches reach and teach missions.

Thom S. Rainer wrote a book titled, *High Expectations: The Remarkable Secret for Keeping People in Your Church*. He mentions other common denominators that growing churches possess. One of those is a strong Sunday school or small group ministry. The discipleship part of a church should be the ministry that retains and assimilates people into the various ministries. Churches that only do outreach, forget the idea of discipleship as stated in the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19-20. Discipleship ministry has to play a large part in the success of a church. Sunday school, small groups, men's ministry, women’s ministry are the detail components of the common denominator that all growing churches possess.

Another common denominator in growing churches is the emphasis on experiencing God's presence in corporate worship in their daily life. The sense of emphasis draws a person to have a desire to experience God's presence in all of His holiness and glory. The following chart looks at the regular attenders of Christian churches and how often they have experienced God's presence in their life.
When a great emphasis is placed on experiencing God's presence, people understand how to worship in the context it is modeled in. While Jesus was talking to the woman at the well he states,

Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.\(^4\)

Worship is not about a location, building, or atmosphere but is about experiencing God's presence. People are drawn to God's presence and see some worship as an imposter or fabrication of God's presence. A common denominator among all growing churches is that their worship seeks to experience God's presence.

Churches that are growing have a strong follow-up practice with visitors. This common denominator among growing churches is important because it shows the visitor that the church

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\(^3\) George Barna, *The Habits of Highly Effective Churches* (Regal: Ventura CA), 84.

cares about them. Some churches may bake cookies and deliver them to a visitor’s house. Some churches may send a follow-up letter from the pastor or staff. Some churches may send teams to visit people a few days after the visitor attends a church service. There are some churches that may do all three of these examples and that can be highly effective if done in the correct manner. Whichever method is used it makes the visitor feel loved and cared for by the church they worshiped with.

Regardless of the method of follow-up, churches that are highly effective supply the visitor with some type of material that will give the visitor more information about the church. The more information a visitor has about the church and the better he/she understands the dynamics within the church, the more they are inclined to become involved. Some churches may inform their guests about their ministries as soon as they walk in the door, others may prefer to give them information on follow-up encounters. A church does not want to overwhelm visitors or pester them. However, it should make visitors feel loved and provide them with resources to inform them about the church.

Somewhere in the follow-up material there will be information on another common denominator among growing churches - a new member’s class. A membership class is a good thing to have to inform people of all the details about the church before they become a member. Most evangelical churches allow people to join the local church by their statement of faith and baptism or transfer of membership from a church with common theology. Churches that do not have a new member’s class have a hard time conveying and communicating how the church operates. The following figure illustrates the context in the New Member’s Class.
Table 19 Topics Included in the New Member Class

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Doctrine of the Church (67.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Polity/government of church (66.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Examination of church constitution (64.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Purpose of the Lord’s Supper/Communion and baptism (63.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Examination of church covenant/church discipline (63.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Policies for church discipline/exclusion of members (62.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Expectations of members after joining (58.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>History of church (56.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tour of church facilities (56.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Denominational information (51.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Plan of salvation (49.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tithing/financial support of the church (47.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Method/meaning of baptism (38.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Requirements for membership (38.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Current opportunities for service in the church (37.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Training in spiritual disciplines (35.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Introduction to church staff and leadership (33.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Explanation of the church’s mission and/or vision (32.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Inventory of spiritual gifts (29.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Structure/support of missions (21.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Training for witnessing/evangelism (18.6%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The new membership class is one of the main common denominators with growing churches. Churches that are growing and focused on the Great Commission may utilize a new member class to assimilate people into ministries throughout the church.

In recent years, the word "assimilation" has become a popular term among church growth writers. It is the idea of placing visitors or new believers into ministries where they can succeed as followers of Jesus by exercising their gifts and talents. The old saying goes, "if you don't use them, you will lose them." People want to be involved for a sense of purpose. People desire to feel like they are needed, and that is what assimilation fulfills. It shows people the place where

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they need to serve to help out the local church, and exercise their God-given ability in ministering to other people.

The next common denominator is strong leadership. Throughout the statistics and research there has been a common idea of churches depending on their leadership. Churches that are depending on leadership must have strong leadership to be able to grow and flourish. When leadership is not present in a church it is hard for the church to find direction, produce disciples and control conflict. Without strong leadership it is almost impossible for a church to function in a proper manner that puts the Great Commission first.

Taking the Bible seriously compels a church to follow the outlines that are placed in for the Great Commission, which is another strong common denominator among growing churches. This is indicated in the research of how important the Great Commission is to the church. When churches take the Great Commission seriously they take the entire Bible seriously. This allows them to use the Bible as their guide because they see it as the infallible word of God.

When churches take the Bible serious, they allow their pastors to preach and lead the church the way the church was intended to operate. The church was commissioned in Acts 1:8, to be a witness for Jesus Christ. When the pastor can stand in the pulpit week after week preaching sermons from the New Testament, without being condemned for speaking the truth in love, churches can operate more effectively. Many people lose sight of the mission because it is hard to keep the focus on the mission unless leadership can keep the mission in front of the people by preaching the Bible.

**How Does a Great Commission Church Work?**

Part of finding out what works to fulfill the Great Commission, the "how" question, must be answered. Pastors and church leaders are looking for how a church has grown in the last
several years. Churches that successfully grow over time keep the correct perspective of the Great Commission. The perspective of the entire church matters greatly on how they see and understand their responsibility to reach the world for Jesus Christ. There are six characteristics that churches possess when they have the right perspective of the Great Commission.

The first characteristic deals with their focus on the Great Commission and their ability to identify distractions and eliminate them from their ministries. Keeping the Great Commission as the focal point of the church is a difficult task. There are many different things that will come about in the life of the church that may be a distraction from the Great Commission. These distractions can be people that are seeking their own agendas or people that desire to be a part of ministries that do not carry out the Great Commission.

Distractions are inevitable; they are everywhere in a person’s life and in a life of the church. There are many great programs, ministry ideas, and new trends that Christians flock to and some are distractions from the Great Commission. There will always be the new and exciting trends of ministry that will fade in time. New ministries in the 1920’s are out of date. The church cannot allow methods to become distractions from the message. Distractions are going to happen, but the church that is filling the Great Commission, keeps the mission clear and continues to remind people of the church’s is purpose.

When church leaders remind congregations of the church's purpose and keep the vision that God has given them, they are less likely to be distracted. Leadership of the church, at times, will take a lot of criticism for not allowing every ministry idea to be done. If the leadership of the church allows every idea to be done in the name of the Great Commission, in fact, the Great Commission may not be fulfilled because there are too many distractions and not enough focus on the true mission. The focus of the church must be narrow and precise on what God has called
the church to do in Matthew 28:19-20.

The second characteristic of a church that is for filling the Great Commission is every ministry is done because of the Great Commission. Ministries that do not fulfill the Great Commission are a waste of time for the local church. God has called the church to fulfill the Great Commission and reach people for Jesus Christ. Some churches have the mentality that having more ministries benefits the church; however any ministry that is done without the focus of the Great Commission limits the church on fulfilling the Great Commission effectively. Every ministry that does not have the Great Commission as its focal point takes away from ministries in the church that focuses on the Great Commission. Every ministry in a church is asking for the same resources, so ministries that carry out the Great Commission should take priority over ministries that do not reach out. Inward focus ministries can overtake the budget of a church and the church can become an inward focused, non-evangelistic church quickly. Churches that are fulfilling the Great Commission are making sure that every ministry in church is reaching out to people.

The third characteristic of how Great Commission church's work is based on their reason for existence. Churches that are for filling the Great Commission know why they exist. They are not ashamed of the Great Commission nor do they apologize for sharing the gospel with people. Churches that are growing exist for the purpose of reaching people. They have rejected the idea of reaching a limited number of people and see churches as the hub to fulfilling the Great Commission. They exist for the purpose of the Great Commission.

Churches that are reaching people with the Great Commission have a fourth characteristic; all of their funds are focused on the Great Commission. The budget between a church that is focused on the Great Commission and reaching people is extremely different from
the church budget that is inwardly focused and ultimately dying. One of the best times to notice these differences is the process in which the church takes to approve spending. Take for example, if a church is going to spend $2000 for ministry (budget item) and it has to ask multiple levels of leadership, there is a large level of distrust in the church. Where there is a lack of trust the Great Commission will suffer and restrictions will be placed on the approval of funds. The following table explains this and shows the percentages of churches that require multiple levels of approval.

Table 20 If you want to spend $2,000 for ministry, who must you have permission from?
The item is a budgeted item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Approval from</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Deacons</td>
<td>8.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Elders</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Church</td>
<td>38.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of the above</td>
<td>2.78%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Forty percent of the churches surveyed require their leaders to vote twice on funds for ministry over $2000. Remember, this is for a budgeted item. These churches indicated they voted on the money once in the annual budget in twice before they could spend the money. This causes church leaders to get very discouraged and lose focus of the mission. Churches that are actively caring out the Great Commission, streamline the process of funding and spending funds because time is souls.

The fifth characteristic that churches possess when they are working to fulfill the Great Commission resides in their leadership. Their leadership understands the role within the church and their position in the Great Commission. For example, deacons understand that they are to support the pastoral leadership by caring for the congregation's needs. Sometimes those needs may be assimilating people into small groups so members can be connected with one another.
Another example would be the role of the senior pastor in relationship to the rest of the staff. He should be a resource of encouragement and equipping the staff for the work of the ministry and always keeping the Great Commission in front of the staff and church. Leadership is the key to the church's success. Churches that are for fulfilling the Great Commission understand the leadership roles in the church.

The sixth characteristic of a Great Commission Church is the approach it takes in changing things. Many leaders go into churches and identify the things they perceive need changing. The Great Commission church identifies things that need to change based on the Great Commission. Change in these churches happens for the purpose of being more effective in reaching people. They are not interested in changing the gospel, but look for every effective way to reach people with the Gospel. Great Commission Churches understand change must take place to reach younger generations. A church should not change unless the change is for the purpose of reaching people by fulfilling the Great Commission.

The six characteristics are the beginning of exploring the inner workings of a Great Commission church. These tendencies are really a change in the way a church approaches challenges within the church. A church leader must take note of these characteristics and lead his ministry to adopt these ideas. The process of leading people to adopt these ideas can be difficult, but very rewarding at the same time. The last chapter gives ideas of how to lead a church to change their current characteristics to be effective with the Great Commission.
CHAPTER FIVE
LEADING A CHURCH FROM CONGREGATION-LED TO ELDER-LED

When looking at this research and understanding the amount of time a church may spend on administrative duties, it is clear this could cause a lack of focus on the Great Commission. Throughout the research, there is also a lack of clarity on which government structure works the best overall. It would be best to determine the right government structure based on the people in the particular local church. Even though both, Congregation-led and Elder-led governing methods have their advantages and disadvantages, there is no clear advantage for one over the other, making it hard to draw a conclusion to the research. However, a church that has a model of leadership established on biblical principals and focuses on the Great Commission will have a clear process of making decision.

Elder-led seems to have the easiest structure in which to make changes within the local church. Congregationalists seem to have the most roadblocks; however, these roadblocks turn into blessings because the leader understands the congregation better. Elder-led churches streamlines the decisions that need to be made with little input from the people. It would really be difficult for an extreme Congregation-led church to become an Elder-led church. However, there could be Congregation-led churches or Elder-led churches that would adopt a government structure in the middle of those two extremes.

Most Congregation-led churches would have a hard time trusting the leadership to give up their vote and allowing the pastors, staff or an elder board to make all the decisions. When churches have been established for a long time in the congregation style, change would be difficult. The main factor in a church moving away from Congregation-led would be control. The
Congregationalists believe that the power resides with the people. Transitioning them to an Elder-led church or a hybrid version would be difficult to do unless the power issue is address.

Many churches from a Baptist background should consider using terms other than Elder-led in their transition phase. Many Baptist and non-reformed thinkers will not like the idea of Elder-led churches. At the start of the conversation when the term “elder” is used, many Baptist will resist the idea of a limited number of people leading the church. Try to use another term, such as staff-led or pastoral led. Non-reformed thinkers would prefer these terms over Elder-led. In practice theory, a Pastoral-led would operate in the same manner as an Elder-led that has a Head Elder. In this chapter and for all intended purposes, Elder-led and Pastoral-led should be interchangeable.

Transitioning an Elder-led church to a more Congregation-led church imposes challenges in itself. There is no known reason why a church would transition from an Elder-led to a Congregation-led unless the people lost confidence in their leadership. The loss of confidence will bring about a loss of trust. When the people do not trust their leadership, they begin looking for a way they can make the decisions. This leads the church to begin the transition from an Elder-led to a Congregation-led government. If this ever happens in a church, the next pastor search committee will need to be prepared to answer questions as to why this was done. This would only happen if there were a lack of trust in the eldership of the church. This transition would be very difficult and hard for the church to keep unity among the believers.

Regardless of the direction of the change, change is still present. The word change can have a very negative connotation in many congregations. Good change would come when a church sets itself up to fulfill the Great Commission in a more effective manner. The Great Commission should be the focal point of all churches and is the standard for the mission of the
church. Any church that does not promote the Great Commission needs to have some type of change in its organizational structure. The commandment to fulfill the mission in the local church should be smooth and easy.

There not only needs to be a change in the local church to make the Great Commission the focal point, but also make it easy to fulfill. The devil makes the Great Commission hard enough to accomplished, churches should not be working against themselves. The process to fulfill the Great Commission has been cluttered and foggy, making it complicated to fulfill. Change in any church is difficult but changing the governing structure can seem to be almost impossible. In this chapter, steps to make wise transitions and changes in a church from one governing system to another will be explained. These steps can and should be used to lead a church in any type of change.

Prayer

In changing a church’s government system the leadership should always begin with prayer. Prayer should always be the first step in change. The church leaders should seek to find the direction in which God would have them lead the church. They should ask themselves one major question, "How can we improve the church's operation process to fulfill the Great Commission?" To find the answer to this question, the leadership should start with prayer.

The church that seeks to improve their mission needs to begin with prayer. John Wesley stated, "Prayer is where the action is."¹ Prayer is the action of getting God involved in the local church. Many leaders do not start with prayer, but seek what they can do instead of seeking what God wants them to accomplish. Prayer is the action of finding out what God wants for the local

church now, and if He wants it to change. Change is needed when churches are not reaching their community for Jesus Christ. The first change is the action of prayer.

Prayer brings about a change in a person's thinking, which is a change in the way they act or their actions. "Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays." When there is a change in a person's thinking and actions, there becomes a change in the way people see the Great Commission. Prayer leads us to conviction for the lost because people understand the nature of God and His desire for all people to be saved. The more people pray and understand who God is, in all of His being; people discover that God is more concerned with the unsaved of this world than He is the preference for the church. Prayer brings about a change in people that helps to refocus on why the church exists, and to refocus on the Great Commission.

Prayer has been described many times as a powerful tool that Christians possess. Many people may not see prayer as the major factor in mobilizing evangelism. However, it is the most important piece in reaching the world for Christ. People are asking for a great revival and a great movement of God in the current state of America. This will never take place until the people of God begin to pray. Andrew Murray states, "The man who mobilizes the Christian church to pray will make the greatest contribution to world evangelization in history." Prayer will bring about a great revival that will surpass any other great awakening in history, but it's going to take mobilizing people to pray for a movement from God. A revival does not start with government officials, but with the church. The church must pray if it is going to change and be more effective at reaching people for Jesus Christ.

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2 Ibid.

Church leaders may enter into a time of transition in a church that gives them a sense that change is on the horizon. They see the change coming and they know things must be different for the church to be more effective at reaching people. However, they underestimate the power of prayer. Martin Luther states, "Prayer is a strong wall fortress of the church; it is a goodly Christian weapon." The church of today needs to realize that all things must be bathed in prayer because prayer changes things before problems arise.

Many leaders would depend on other things in their lives before they actually humble themselves and pray. Some will rely on their own wisdom or knowledge before they will seek the face of God. Abraham Lincoln said, "I have been driven many times up on my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go. My own wisdom is that of all about me seems insufficient for that day." Even major leaders, like presidents, resort to their own wisdom before seeking wisdom from God. This is a trend that is often too common in the Christian world of leadership.

We tend to use prayer as a last resort, but God wants it to be our first line of defense. We pray when there's nothing else we can do, but God wants us to pray before we can do anything at all. Most of us would prefer, however, to spend our time doing something that will get immediate results. We don't want to wait for God to resolve matters in His good time, because His idea of 'good time' is seldom in sync with ours.

Prayer is the first line of defense in this world. The more a person prays the better they understand this principle because prayer brings us to a state of humbly relying on God and His

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7 Ibid., (Accessed February 13, 2015).
timing in His way. There is no need to change the church until God has shown the leaders the direction that the church should go.

The direction of the church can be determined by praying for four simple things:

1. Clear understanding of the church’s mission field. Churches are seeking to fulfill the Great Commission and sum that up in the context of the entire world. Churches must narrow that number down to a realistic target area that can become believable and achievable. Most people in the first century knew and understood the mass number of people in the world around them. There are most likely more people in America than there was in the entire world during the first century. One church in America cannot fathom the overwhelming feeling of reaching out to over 350 million people that call America home. Churches must pray, seeking and asking God, what the local church’s realistic mission field is for them.

2. A church’s direction can be determined by the way they approach reaching the realistic mission field. Churches should be praying about the way God desires them to reach the realistic mission field. Some churches are located in the middle of the city and will have different ministries than a church located outside of the city limits. Churches with an average age of 30 years old will have different ministries than churches with an average age of 65. The church must seek God’s desire they are to reach and then pray to find the best approach to reach them.

3. Every church that seeks to find direction must pray about the most effective way to fulfill the approach. There are many different ways to carrying out ministry and in this step of seeking direction, the church is praying and searching for the most effective way. Ministry can be carried out using different set-ups, both Congregational and Elder-Led churches do ministry. The question needs to be answered, “Which way is going to be the most effective in each local church? The most effective for the local church may vary from church to church. However, a
local church should always pray to find the most effective way possible to fulfill the approach to reaching people.

4. Finally, every church must pray about the amount of influence they are going to allow their leadership to possess. This step is where all theories, God-led ideas and comprehensive understanding of God’s direction, will move forward or move backwards. The amount of influence from the leadership will create push back from church members faster than anything else. Established or church planets, young or mature believers; every church has people that believe that the staff, elders or Senior Pastor has more influence or power than they should. However, the larger the church becomes, the less influence members will have and more influence the Senior Pastor possess. Regardless the size and who has the influence, if a church cannot make a decision quickly, they are wasting time when people are dying without Jesus. This point of prayer is sometimes the most debated issue and not the most prayed about issue. Make sure to lead the church to pray about the mission field, the approach taken to reach the mission field, the approach is the most effective and defining the responsibility of staff and lay leadership.

**Preach and Lead to Show Why**

When a leader proposes to change an element in the church, the people will begin to ask "why?" Every leader needs to understand that in every decision he makes, that question will be asked. He must have a valid reason why he is doing what he are doing, and how will it affect the church. Answering the "why" and "how" questions will save the leadership many hours of frustration and explanation. It is better to lead in front of the people, also known as, answering all the questions before they are asked. There will be some questions that cannot be answered
and the best policy is to be honest. All questions that can be answered need to be answered, before the proposal to change is presented to the people.

Sometimes answering questions comes by preaching or leading, to show the people the reason for the change. In preaching and teaching, it is the pastor's responsibility to motivate people for a change. Dwight D. Eisenhower stated, "Motivation is the art of getting people to do that you want them to do because they want to do it." Preaching and leading should come in the form of motivating people to change because they desire to be in God's will.

Preaching and leading is centered on the motivation to change. Whether that is a change in a church's government style or in a person’s life, there should always be an element of motivating people to change. Andy Stanley sums this up,

That Sunday morning was a defining moment. Since then, I've repaired hundreds of outlines and preached hundreds of sermons. But my goal has been the same since that exasperating night in my efficiency apartment, wrestling with the story of Namaan. Every time I stand to communicate, I want to take one simple truth and lodge it in the heart of the listener. I want them to know that one thing and know what to do with it. 9

This is the approach of preaching for a change. Every sermon in the lesson should have some element of motivating people to change their behavior, ways for them to have a closer relationship with Jesus Christ, and a better understanding of the Bible.

The leader should always begin with prayer, then preach and lead in the direction God is going. Notice that preaching and leading are connected. The power of leadership is having the ability to stand before a crowd and influence them to go in a particular direction. The power of influence comes from the pulpit and personal interaction with the congregation. The influence

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9 Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, Communicating for a Change (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomath Books) 2006, 12.
from the pulpit must mirror the direction the church is headed. This key principle of leadership in the church is the second most important thing in moving a church from one situation to another.

Notice that what comes from the pulpit must be in sync with the leadership of the church. There must be unity between the pulpit and the leadership of the church. Too many times in the history of the church pastors and other leaders were not united with what was being said from the pulpit. The leaders of the church must be unified in all that is taking place, or one section of the church will be undermining the other section, and people will begin to walk out the door. Growing churches have to trust in their leaders and allow them to lead without creating division among the staff. There has to be unity between how people see the pastor on Sunday morning and what people hear on Monday morning. Once a church has a good leader, they should let him lead and get out of his way. The only question that members should ask themselves about the direction of the church is simple, "Is this the direction that God is leading our pastor?" If they know that God is in the direction that they are going, and they begin to challenge that direction, the pastor will understand that the people are challenging God and not him. When people challenge God they will always lose. God has placed leadership in churches for a reason and as long as they are seeking His direction the people should follow.

People are going to naturally ask, "Why are we doing this?" Through preaching and leading the people, a church should have the majority, if not all of their questions answered before a change takes place. The idea of preaching and leading will show why something is being done. It should be carried out for the purpose of unity and clarification of the direction that is being taken for the church.
Understand Your Church

When pastors preach and lead a congregation for many years they begin to develop an understanding of the people in that church. This knowledge and understanding of the people in his church is priceless, and only a pastor with a long tenure will know. Knowing people is not taught in seminary, but it is learned with longevity in a local church. It is very important for the pastor to understand the congregation that he is leading before he makes too many decisions with the church. The golden rule of changing the church structure is that the pastor should be at the church for at least five years before changing the constitution.

A pastor should have a good understanding of the reasoning behind what is done in the church before he can go and change it. A wise pastor once said, "Find out why the fence is there before you tear it down." A pastor never knows what is on the other side of the fence until he asks for the reason why the fence is there. If a pastor is not aware of the reason the fence is there, he could be tearing down a fence that is holding back wolves that will attack him. The pastor needs to make sure before he tears down a fence that there are bunny rabbits behind that fence, and not wolves. This is all part of understanding the church before one begins to make a change.

It takes time to understand a church. It is not an overnight adventure or a few months but it is measured in years. To put it into reality, there is not enough time in a week for a pastor to prepare two or three sermons a week, visit a few people, work with a staff, and get to know everyone in just a few months. It takes years for a pastor to understand his congregation. It takes a few funerals and weddings for him to understand his people. It takes hospital visits and counseling sessions to understand another section of the church. It takes deacon’s meetings and
ministry team meetings to understand other parts of the church. This all takes time and a pastor cannot understand a church without having patience and spending time with a church.

**Moving Slowly and Being Patient**

Ministry and churches often move very slowly with change. Churches have to be reminded of why the changes are needed. It takes patience from a pastor to remind them in his preaching and leading. Often the leadership has to get the church praying about the change before the church will accept the change. In the entire process of changing the government style of a church, the pastor will learn a lot about the church. The process of bring about change in the church requires an ample amount of patience.

When Paul is talking about the approved worker in second Timothy, he centers the characteristics of a patient person.

And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, [patience], in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.\(^\text{10}\)

He starts this passage of scripture with direct instructions that indicate the servant of the Lord must be patient. He does not give an option of getting into hurry or moving in a direction to quickly. The pastor and other church leaders must understand that patience is needed when churches make changes. There will always be people who will question the change. Whether the change is a staff member, senior pastor, change to the by-laws or government structure; there will be a time that church members will question the direction of the church. In these times of questioning, the leadership should remind the church to be patient because change takes time.

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\(^\text{10}\) II Timothy 2:24-26 (NKJV).
Change does take time and the effect of the change takes even longer. Major changes in the church, like finding a pastor, may take a year or two. Transitioning from one pastor to another pastor will take longer to take effect, as church growth takes time. All changes will affect the way the church operates and does ministry. Some changes take longer to see results than others, and the people will need to be patient to see the full effect of those changes.

Not all changes will be good changes and not all changes will turn out to be what the leadership anticipated. Sometimes a change seems to be the best thing for the church and the outcome surprises the leadership and does not turn out the way originally anticipated. Somehow, in the midst of change, the people of a church have to find patience and know that God is working things out. Sometimes changes in a church are not visible but they are there and happen gradually.

Moving slow will help people be patient in the change. There have been churches that have basically destroyed themselves by moving too fast in unfamiliar territory. Recently, in the last fifteen years, incorporation has been a major topic of discussion in churches throughout the State of Virginia. Some churches have destroyed themselves because the leadership moved too quickly. Timing is everything in churches and with God. God makes it clear in Ecclesiastes chapter three, that there is a time for everything. Churches and church leaders at times move too quickly and get ahead of what God is going to do. It is extremely important to move slowly and be patient when working through change in a church.

Going back to the example of incorporation, incorporation is not the issue that has destroyed several churches, but the issue is the speed in which the process was carried out. Incorporation is not a bad thing, but how the leadership of a church leads the church to become incorporated can leave the impression in people's minds that incorporation is a bad thing.
Incorporation has a lot of great qualities, such as liability is not on a set of individual trustees and no one is held legally responsible for actions taking place on church property that they cannot control. However, if the concept of incorporation is presented to the church in the wrong way, or without prayer, patience and moving slowly, the church will become rebellious.

**Correct Motives**

When churches begin to pray about the changes that need to take place, they should evaluate the motives of why the change is necessary. Change can come about from a need or a want. Those who desire to see something change for selfish reasons have an incorrect motive for why it should be done. The motives that are used to transform a church may have a great positive or negative effect on its members. If the pastor or leadership has the wrong motives, the method and process of change will not matter. The wrong motives will lead a church down a slippery slope of accusation that will destroy a church. Soul-searching needs to be part of the prayer time when considering making changes in a church.

People can see when the leadership of the church is making a change because of its own desires. Its motives, at times, may seem selfish and self-centered, but they need to ensure that the reason for the change comes from a conviction given by God through prayer. Changes in churches are difficult to manage and navigate. The leadership must ensure that their motive for change is for the Great Commission and not for their selfish desires.

When leaders become so entrenched with their own ideas and methods, their motives become skewed because they are trying to reach their desired place in a church. People know when a church is all about a person and not about the Lord. John Maxwell sums it up this way, “Attitude is really about how a person is. That overflows into how he acts.”

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attitude can speak louder than his words and he needs to be very careful about how he approaches change in the church. Without the correct motives the people will see his true reason for the change.

In the middle of the leader’s prayer time, he should take time and ask God to search his heart to find out if his motives are pure. Jesus tells us, "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man." The attitude and motives that the leader takes comes from the heart's motives, and prayer will reveal to the leader his motives. It is extremely important when a pastor is considering change in the church to examine himself, to discover the true motives of the change. No change in the church should take place unless the change is for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission more effectively.

Conclusion

There are churches that are on both sides of government styles. Most of these churches are Congregation-led or Elder-led in their approach to church government. There are many different hybrid versions of these two government styles. Some churches tend to be one of the extremes; either an extreme Congregation-led where everyone votes on every little detail or an extreme Elder-led where only a select few men make all the decisions in the church. Both examples are hard to support Biblically. As stated in previous chapters, there is an element of ownership through a servitude approach in the local church. Members should serve, should be involved; however, they should not expect to have the ability to make every decision or the church will suffer. On the other side, an Elder-led church without any input from church members toward decisions would create or disconnect from the leaders and members of the church. These are two extreme versions of these church government styles.

12 Matthew 15:18 (NKJV).
When the leaders of a church decide to change church government styles that may have been in existence for many years, they need to remember the ideas that were discussed in the last chapter. It is not easy to lead a church from one government style to another. It may be best for the leadership of the church to gradually move a church from one government style to another by creating a hybrid version between the two styles. Then, after several years, the leadership can transition the church to a more Biblical approach of church government. The Bible is clear that Elder-led means a group of men, and the congregation should have input with those in leadership positions.

With final encouragement, change or transition needs to be for the right reason. It should be for the purpose of aligning a church in a particular structure to be the most effective at reaching people for Jesus Christ. Let all the changes that are done in the local church be for the purpose of reaching more people with the Gospel for the glory of God and the kingdom of God.
APPENDIX

Survey Questions

A BIBLICAL GUIDE TO MAXIMIZING THE GREAT COMMISSION BY TRANSFORMING YOUR CHURCH GOVERNMENT

Marcus W. Bridges

Liberty University

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary

Doctorate of Ministry Program

Please answer each question with the answer that best describes your ministry growth and government.

1. How long have you been in your current place of ministry?
   a. 0-3 years
   b. 4-6 years
   c. 7-15 years
   d. 16-25 years
   e. 26 or more years

2. By what percentage has the church ministry grown in the last five years?
   a. Declined
   b. By less than 5%
   c. By more than 5%
   d. By more than 10%
   e. By more than 20%

3. If you are to start a new ministry, who do you ask permission to do so?
   a. Your Supervisor
   b. The Deacons
   c. The Elders
   d. The Church
   e. All the above

4. If you wanted to spend $2600 for ministry, who must you have permission from? The item is a budgeted item.
   a. Your Supervisor
   b. The Deacons
   c. The Elders
   d. The Church
   e. All the above
5. What does your church call the groups that help carry out the ministry?
   a. Committees
   b. Ministry Teams
   c. Ministry Counsels
   d. Both A and C
   e. Both B and C
   f. None, Other

6. How many mission outreach events do you have each year?
   a. Less than 5
   b. More than 5
   c. More than 10
   d. More than 15

7. Do you find it difficult to carry out The Great Commission to the best of your ability in your current ministry because of the church governing process?
   a. Yes
   b. No

8. Do you think there is a lack of trust for the leadership of your church?
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. Do you think the by-laws or operating manual compel you to carry out The Great Commission?
   a. Yes
   b. No

10. How many pages are the by-laws or operating manual at your church?
    a. Less than 5 pages.
    b. More than 10 pages.
    c. More than 15 pages.
    d. More than 20 pages.

11. How do you think your church would rank the Great Commission?
    a. Somewhat important
    b. Important
    c. Extremely important

12. What is the best definition of the word “Go” in Matthew 28:19? Only Select one.
    a. The Church should have services that reach people.
    b. The Church should have ministry that are mission minded
    c. The Church should have mission trips.
13. Does your church allow their pastor paid time off for mission trips?
   a. Yes
   b. No

14. Do you think your church’s by-laws focus on the Great Commission?
   a. Yes
   b. No

15. What does your church spend more time doing?
   a. Evangelism, Outreaching, Visiting
   b. Business Meeting, Deacons Meetings, Committee Meetings
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Anyabwile, Thabiti M. *What is a Healthy Church Member?*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008.


July 10, 2014

Marcus Bridges

Transforming Your Church Government

Dear Marcus,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance
with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA)
regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin
your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and
that no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101 (b)(2), which identifies specific situations in
which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey
procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is
recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the
subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place
the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing,
employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and that any
changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued
exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new
application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption, or need assistance in determining whether possible
changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling
(434) 592-4054

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971
CONSENT FORM
A BIBLICAL GUIDE TO MAZIMIZING THE GREAT COMMISSION BY TRANSFORMING YOUR CHURCH GOVERNEMENT

Marcus Bridges
Liberty University
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary

You are invited to be in a research study of how The Great Commission can be maximized by transforming your church government. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a leader in your local church, either paid or volunteer. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Marcus Bridges, doctoral candidate in the Seminary at Liberty University is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to find areas within the local church’s governing structure that is restricting the church from carrying out The Great Commission. By transforming the church government the church as be more effective in reaching people for Jesus Christ.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things: Thank you for taking the time to consider taking part in a research project that will help churches maximize The Great Commission for years to come. By following this link (https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/YDP7WNG), you can take the survey. Completing the 12 questions and emailing your church's by-law, if possible, to mbridges@liberty.edu. This should take less than 20 minutes. If you have any question about the survey you can email me at mbridges@liberty.edu.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has several risks: There is no more risk to the participant that he or she would encounter in everyday life.

The benefits to participation are to enhance the way churches govern their business, so they can be more focused on The Great Commission and less on their business.

Compensation:

You will receive no payment or compensate of any types for this research. You are not entitled to any royalties from this research or material written based on this research.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Record will be stored on a USB Drive, held in a personal fire proof safe.
I understand that my church name may be used to reference information within the project. The church name is mainly used to identify the by-laws submitted by email.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Marcus Bridges. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at mbridges@liberty.edu or 757-334-1937. To contract his advisor, Dr. Charlie Davidson, cdavidson@liberty.edu or 434-592-4241.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

Signature: ___________________________ Date: ________________

Signature of Investigator: ___________________________ Date: ________________