

HOW WE DO WHAT WE DO - EMPOWERMENT FOR MINISTRY WHAT IS A PERMISSION GIVING ENVIRONMENT?

HISTORICALLY, MOST ORGANIZATIONS HAVE BEEN CONTROL BASED. The leadership of the organization is usually the control base. What the leaders want is often what the leaders, and everyone else, gets. If the ice cream store owners really don't want to sell strawberry ice cream - they don't. People who want strawberry ice cream will have to go elsewhere, which may be okay with the owners. We all have to make choices, and part of the "choosing mechanism" has to do with the leaders of an organization. A lawyer will decide what cases to take. A hardware store will decide not to have a paint department. This doesn't only happen in small organizations. Henry Ford said it a long time ago - *they can have any color car they want, as long as it's black*. The problem is that if control is based in a person or in a board: that person or board has limits. There are many ways that we can be limited; by our abilities, passions, knowledge, gifts, time, resources, viewpoint, technology, understanding of market needs, or perceptions of those we serve. We are also limited by our whims, quirks, moods, desires, resistance to change, and our stubbornness. Some days the leadership may be more open to new ideas than others. Sometimes the experience or the dysfunctions of the leaders will affect the choices made. If I had a bad experience painting a green house, I may never consider using green paint again. Control concentrated in a power base limits our effectiveness.

THE OLD CHURCH PARADIGM. The same thing happens in churches. Most congregations have a governing structure that is designed for control. If an individual has an idea for a new ministry, they need to figure out what committee should see it first. There is often debate about which committee should be the gatekeeper. If the young people want to spend money to invite an outside speaker to a worship service, does it go to the Youth Committee, the Worship Committee, or the Finance Committee? You will probably need to check with the Church Council. In some congregations, the treasurer has the power to refuse to pay a bill. Sometimes a matriarch or patriarch must be consulted. Certain groups may have a larger circle of control than might be first understood. The adult choir may have a say in everything that happens in the worship service. The pastor is almost always a key factor in control discussions. It is not uncommon for minor decisions to have to move through several stages. The result is that there are multiple levels in many decision-making structures that seem to effectively put a stop to good ideas.

It is important to know that control is usually exercised in very subtle ways. *Be sure to check with the choir director on that. The pastor might not like it.* People inside a system have adjusted to the dynamics of the decision-making process. *Everyone knows that the council votes on everything.* Sometimes the entire congregation can be the controlling mechanism. There is a rural church which had decided to place lights on their previously simply-decorated Christmas tree, but the location made placement of an extension cord difficult. They actually had a congregational vote on whether to install a plug in the chancel. The chancel was holy space and would be spoiled by the invading element. Chances are that the real issue was not the plug itself - but when control mechanisms rest with people, we often disguise or are even unaware of our true feelings. It has been said that the seven last words of the church are, *"We never did it that way before"*.

The sad thing is that a control-based organization involves some unbiblical assumptions. Many people in this country assume that the church is a democracy - everyone should be consulted. The church is a theocracy - ruled by God. Find out what God's will is and do it. Anything short of that is sin. There are other persistent ideas - perhaps the worst is that we have to keep everyone happy. The problem is that some of the people who make their way into churches, have some serious personal problems which end up affecting the overall organization. They may be people who will never be happy. We end up doing only the really safe things - anything controversial is stopped. Even good ideas are killed. Accepting the authority of scripture, the Bible should naturally be part of our discussions. It often is not, with personal opinions often mattering more. Standing on the priesthood of all believers, we need to recognize that God may plant good ideas in any believer. The Pharisees were warned that they were

holding fast to the traditions of people and not teaching the things of God. We are always in danger of becoming the new pharisees.

The real control mechanism in churches ought to be a prayerfully sought Statement of Purpose - summarized in a clearly articulated statement of values (what we hold true), mission (what we do), and vision (what we are becoming). These should be "larger" than any individual leader or group. They should last longer than moods. They direct the organization and help shape the leaders and the work of the congregation. People are not supposed to control an organization - the vision is.

The task of leadership then becomes understanding and articulating the vision. When a new idea comes forward, it is not accepted or rejected based on the whims of the leadership. If God works in the life of each individual Christian, then every idea birthed in the heart of a believer has value. If it is accepted, it ought to be because we see it consistent with our beliefs and values, fulfilling our mission, and moving us toward our vision. The organization is turned upside down. Control does not rest in a group at the top. It rests in the hearts of the statements on Values - Mission - Vision. These should be taught and understood by everyone. The environment changes. Everyone agrees on why we are here. We don't need to ask everybody whether we can do something. Permission is given. It is part of the culture. Gifted people are turned loose to do ministry. Four biblical passages: 1 Peter 4, Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12 all point to a picture of the body where each part is gifted for ministry. We tend to confuse ministry and governance. The primary scope of governance belongs to God. Leaders seek God's face and assert His Will, not their own. Ministry is carried out by all of God's people, gifted to serve, called by God, and empowered by his Holy Spirit.

Governance and Ministry

- They are both necessary in the church - but they have different functions - it is best to separate them.
- Governance oversees policy and planning, providing tools - finance, facility, and leadership resources.
- Values - Mission - Vision are the control mechanisms.
- Leaders are vision casters and vision keepers (they help keep us on track).
- Leaders in Governance are to be grease in the wheels of ministry - not sand in the wheels of ministry.
- Ministry is the actual carrying out of the Mission of the Church - moving us toward God's Vision.
- Good ideas are brought through the filters of Mission & Vision - and only killed if they contradict them.

Something needs to be said about the biblical role of the pastor in the church. Most churches have called the pastor to an impossible task of doing most or all of the ministry. Ever hear the words - *That's the pastor's job?* The typical way most churches operate is foolishness. Most pastors have been trained and many are gifted to help in the tasks of ministry. Many pastors are even foolish enough to accept the assignment and attempt to be the sole minister to the Body. It is not biblical. Pastors are demoralized, exasperated, and exhausted trying to do what the people want - not the called ministry of Word and Sacrament: equipping God's people so **they** can do God's work. According to Ephesians 4, God provided pastors to be the Equippers of Saints - so the Saints can do work of Ministry. Pastors are not the primary ministers, the people are. The words "one another" in the Bible assign the people with almost 50 tasks - love one another, visit one another, forgive one another, teach one another. The word 'pastor' occurs only once in all the Bible.

- We need to get pastors doing what they are supposed to do: Teach God's Word and Equip God's People.
- Leaders need to create a permission-giving environment: articulating vision and enabling the ministers.
- The people need to start using their ministry gifts: helping the church fulfill its Mission and Vision.

Empowerment is vital to Ministry

- Trust them with Responsibility
 - Train them for Competence
 - Unleash Them with Authority
 - Monitor them for Accountability
 - Support them as you Love, Care, Equip
- Power
more Freedom
Agreement

Biblical Leadership

- Leadership means more Sacrifice - not more
- Leadership means more Limitations, not more Options
- Leadership means more Risk, not more Respect
- Leadership means more Accountability, not
- Leadership means more Opposition, not more

